

Unggoy are from Venus:

by J. Bittersweet

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Summary: In the midst of the covenant human war, an inexperienced Grunt named Eekyip joins a renowned warrior on a series of dangerous missions.

1. Succeed to Advance

This is my first Halo fic, and it was actually inspired by Zuka 'Zamamee and Yayap from The Flood. Ben and I always liked to joke that they secretly had somethin' goin' on. I realize there aren't a lot of (if any) GruntxElite stories on ff.n, but I can't get the idea out of my head so there ya go. Hope you enjoy!

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**Unggoy are from Venus: Sangheili are from Mars**

Chapter 1: Succeed to Advance

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"What are the chances of him pulling through?"

Voicesâ€|

"Not good...the projectile shredded the breathing apparatus. He was without methane for nearly two whole units."

Muffled voices tugged him out of his unconsciousness.

"...Hmm...what of his injuries?"

His eyes slid open lazily and gradually adjusted to the soft light, shadows cast over him blocking out the harsh sun.

"Nothing serious. A broken arm, a burn on his torso, hisâ€•"

Blurry figures standing over himâ€¦

"But you don't think he'll pull through...?"

His vision became clear, and he recognized the silhouettes of two Elitesâ€¦but his mind was hazy.

"I have my doubts, Excellency."

"Then leave him...you must worry about the ones who will survive...the ones that can still fight..."

It was Eekyip's first day as a soldier.

He'd been told that being a warrior was the greatest honor a creature of the Covenant could receive, that he only had inexperience to lose, and glory and salvation to gain. But there was no glory for him... No glory for a Grunt like him.

Not there on that bloody fieldâ€¦

"To battle, Warriors! Fear neither pain nor death!" an Elite bellowed and charged forward. A host of Grunts followed, growling and whimpering in nervous anticipation. Eekyip was one of them.

His group of trainees had only recently been evaluated by the High Council of Boundless Lucidity. The Council was pleased with the progress of the group. Accordingly, they were transferred immediately to the front lines and placed under the command of a hot-headed rookie Elite named Zabo 'Fuzumee. 'Fuzumee often said that death is the final step to salvation, but Eekyip noted that the human bullets skimmed harmlessly over the blue-armored Elite's energy shield, where as they tore through his kind like tiny airborne razors.

As he debated standing there, frozen in place throughout the battle, Eekyip decided that all Elites were, in fact, insane. He took a step forward, slipped in the mud, and fell on his face. He slowly raised his head and attempted to dislodge his snout from the muggy terrain before coming to the realization that his breathing apparatus was stuck tight. He couldn't move.

Perfect!

"Up, _worm_" Another rookie, Mibo 'Nosamee, last one on the field as always, kicked Eekyip in the rear. The Grunt squealed and tore himself free. He took a deep breath and felt his mouth and face-mask turn icy-cold before staggering up a steep incline towards a stone structure.

The first two battles had been short and uneventfulâ€¦" except for the loss of Fawgof, with whom he had never been closeâ€¦" and Eekyip hoped this third one would be no different. However, they had previously outnumbered the humans three-to-one. As Eekyip reached the top of the slope, he felt his chest tighten. He would have backed away if 'Nosamee hadn't have come up directly behind him. There were easily a hundred humans against two Minor Elites, a red-armored veteran, and fifteen fear-stricken Grunts.

Eekyip watched a short, stocky human with a squared off helmet reload

his weapon and yell over his shoulder, "Aim for the big ones! We'll take care of them first and pick the little bastards off!" A hundred booming shots rang out at once, bullets zipping past Eekyip's head. Moments later, 'Nosamee's shield sparked and a projectile took a shortcut through his throat. He gurgled and fell at Eekyip's feet. The Grunt froze.

The red-armored Elite, whom Eekyip knew only as 'Excellency', ran forward and took three rounds in the chest before his shields faded. After that, he seemed to move a little faster. One shot hit him in the shoulder, but he kept firing. Another tore through his knee, armor shattering and blood spurting. He fell and didn't get up again.

'Fuzumee panicked and fired wildly into a group of humans. Their rifles finished him off within seconds. Between the three of them, the Elites had killed nine humans; Eekyip decided that there were at least ninety left. Out of the corner of his eye he saw a Grunt, Laklaw, fall. In spite of his frozen joints, his heart rate spiked. He remembered his training, reached for his pistol, and took a shot in the face.

The impact sent him spinning and he went down, his left temple slamming into the semi-soft dirt. The field was splattered a horrific bright blue. Eekyip could taste his own blood. The humans were cheering. He wheezed, barely able to breath. Then he heard a familiar sound...

â€|a dropship, like the one that had brought him to this place. Fuchsia plasma fire splashed over the human-held structure and their cheers became screams of pain. Breathing suddenly became a tremendous choreâ€•and Eekyip faded into unconsciousness.

â€|

"â€•the ones that can still fight."

Eekyip jerked. He willed himself awake; he was so unbearably tired, but he forced his eyes open and breathed deeply. If he didn't get up, they would leave him. His vision was blurred, but he could make out a massive gold-armored Elite and a diminutive medic.

"Yes, Excellency," the medic said coldly.

The gold Elite left his line of sight. He could feel the medic relieving him of his plasma pistol and he squirmed in desperation. He could hardly breathe. He wanted to scream and babble about honoring his oath and serving the Hierarchsâ€•anything to persuade them, he wanted to live!

Just then a new figure appeared, fuzzy at the edge of his vision. Eekyip turned his head to get a better look and his sore neck protested violently. He flinched, wheezing a pained noise.

"Hold on."

Eekyip squinted in the direction of the steady voice.

"Are you blind? This one's not dead."

A black-armored SpecOps Elite had taken his plasma pistol from the medic and was holding it out to him.

"Come on, now. Make an effort." The Elite's voice was calm, almost...gentle. "Your injuries are not severe."

Eekyip's muscles tensed, he reached with all his strength, but could not grasp the weapon. The Elite's knees bent just slightly and suddenly the distance was considerably shorter. Eekyip took a firm hold of his pistol and held on for dear life while the Elite hoisted him to his feet.

Eekyip staggered and fell forward. Where he expected to fall on his face, he found himself suspended in midair—the Elite had caught him and was repositioning him on the ground. The Grunt took another step forward, slipped, and kept walking, then suddenly pivoted, unsure of where he was going. The SpecOps Officer had dismissed the medic and another black-armored Elite was coming towards him.

"Iko!" came the approaching officer's rumbling voice.

The Elite, Iko, turned.

"Look alive! Let's secure these survivors and be off. The human is waiting."

"Hm," he murmured, nodding, "quite right!" The two Elites strode off toward a deep-purple dropship. Eekyip hobbled along behind them. Not too far off, a yellow-armored Grunt, about Eekyip's size, ambled up to him.

"Niplip!" Eekyip exclaimed.

"Eekyip!" the Grunt squealed and snorted in excitement.

"You're alive!" they both said at once.

"I killed three humans after the first dropship came in," Niplip exclaimed. "Rigreek says I may be promoted!"

"That's great," Eekyip lied. Niplip was probably the only Grunt in the military who thought a promotion was a good thing. "Rigreek? Is he with the SpecOps?" The other Grunt paused.

"He wears black armor," Niplip provided.

"I've never seen a SpecOps Grunt before." Eekyip decided that this Rigreek must be very brave, or very unfortunate. He then spotted the Grunt—he wore space black armor and wielded an energy rifle. Eekyip wondered if he had scavenged it from a fallen Elite.

"A Commando Grunt..." Eekyip murmured.

"My hero," Niplip whispered. "So, who pulled your face out of the mud, Eekyip." Niplip snorted as he laughed.

Eekyip swallowed. "No one. They were going to leave me."

As naïve as he was, Niplip didn't look surprised. Minor Grunts, such as themselves, were cannon fodder. It was not at all uncommon for the

upper ranks to leave weak or injured Grunts on the field and go dashing off to the next battle.

"So, what happened?"

Eekyip pointed with his good arm. "That SpecOps Elite there, Iko...he helped me pull myself together." Eekyip frowned. "I think it's kind of savage," he mused. "If you can hold onto your weapon, I'll bet the Elites will carry you off the field." Niplip's grip on his pistol tightened reflexively and he eyed the aforementioned Elite.

"...Iko?" he whispered.

"What about him?" Rigreek's voice cut into their conversation like a blade. He'd abandoned his task of tedious name taking to escort the Minor Grunts. "Show the proper respect. His Excellency, Officer 'Ebamee, is a terrific warrior." The SpecOps Grunt's tone softened as he moved under Eekyip's good arm to support him. "You would be seeing him in white, but he has graciously declined the position of SpecOps Commander. He feels that the responsibilities which accompany the position would detain him from battle."

"Butâ€•" Eekyip started to say something about the sanity of one who thinks that a SpecOps Commander doesn't see battle frequently enough, but was wary of the respect this Iko 'Ebamee commanded. "It's a great honor to be offered that position, isn't it?"

Rigreek sighed. "Ehh it's a personal choice. It's complicatedâ€•"and none of your business Rookie."

"He brought it upâ€•|" Eekyip muttered to Niplip.

Eekyip considered the possibility of an Elite who values the lives of even the most unskilled Grunts and chooses efficiency over glory. It sounded like a minor case of sanity. He'd seen it before in Elitesâ€•it was easily treated with rewards and promotions.

They came to a stop before the Spirit dropship. Four black-armored Elites had taken seats on one side and were leisurely checking their weapons. On the side that the Grunts approached were seated two black-armored Elites and a red-clad Major with a head-wound. With the addition of the three Grunts, the bay would be rather crowded. The three Elites were talking like old friends and Eekyip was not keen to disturb them. Rigreek hopped in and extended a hand to the smaller Niplip. Eekyip was content to wait his turn when a pair of strong hands lifted him swiftly and deposited him between Rigreek and one of the SpecOps Elites.

"Iko!" an Elite called sharply from the other side.

Eekyip saw Officer 'Ebamee smile and nod at a SpecOps Elite who called after him as he left. "Honestly, 'Ebamee! What would 'Mozomee do without you?"

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Read The Return of Zamamee and Yayap; by Warrior of Virtue because Zuka 'Zamamee and Yayap are the coolest.

2. Friends in High Places

Yay, I got reviews

Haloobsessed1010: What can I say? I proofread over and over and over and over and _over_ and still wordsend up looking likethis. BSâ€|Hope this one reads smoothly. Thanks for reviewing!

Dreadnaught: It's one of my favorites too. Yayap is my hero. Seriously- when he held 'Zamamee at gun point was probably my favorite part of all three Halo novels. Except maybe the part in First Strike where Linda was all sniping people out of their Banshees. She's my other Halo Hero. Sorry I took so long typin this up. Lazy, lazy...

metal mangalarga marchador: First off- nice name ::thumbs up:: Dude, they totally... you know... had somethin' for eachother... lol And thanks, I'm glad you like it.

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**Unggoy are from Venus: Sangheili are from Mars**

Chapter 2: Friends in High Places

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The U-shaped drop ship floated sluggishly out of view. Eekyip eyed an ominous-looking cloud which he found resembled a roaring Elite. He slowly turned back to his group, casting a look over his shoulder to find the cloud had melted back into a fluffy, gray blob. He took a seat next to Rigreek and his fellow SpecOps Grunt, Mitmeer.

Mitmeer was much larger than Eekyip and had not spoken since the troops had been booted out of the drop shipsâ€•apparently they had duties to perform elsewhere and promised to send a Phantom. This pleased the SpecOps Elite's, who preferred the more practical Phantom just the same. According to Rigreek, Mitmeer was a formidable warrior, but Eekyip just thought he looked miserable. All the same, he gave the warrior a wide berth.

Eekyip turned his plasma pistol over in his hands, examining it. Rigreek looked up from his conversation with Niplip. He held his open hand out to Eekyip. Confused, Eekyip placed the pistol in the SpecOps Trooper's hand. In return, Rigreek dropped his energy rifle in Eekyip's lap.

Eekyip held the rifle up to look at. "It's heavy," he whined.

"Heavier than one of these, yeah," Rigreek replied, "but you've obviously never had to carry a fuel rod gun into battle."

The Minor Grunt looked up from the smooth, blue weapon. Mitmeer snorted and shot a disdainful look at Rigreek, but otherwise remained silent. Rigreek ignored him.

"A what?" Eekyip questioned.

"A fuel rod gun," Rigreek spoke as he adjusted Eekyip's pistol. "A very big gun. Massive. Very heavy. Fires big green blobs of energy. Sort of like a Hunter."

"You've got a gun that looks like a Hunter?" Niplip squealed. Rigreek sighed.

"No, you stupid..." Rigreek gave the plasma pistol a quick examination. "It's a heavy weapon that fires green energy bolts, similar to that of a Hunter's weapon. Here, it should have a faster rate of fire." The SpecOps Trooper handed Eekyip his pistol butt first. Eekyip was intrigued. He secured his pistol and fiddled with the energy rifle, trying to look like he knew what he was doing without damaging the weapon.

"So, you've used one before?" he inquired. He tried to appear nonchalant, but only looked intrigued.

"Once, it was great." The SpecOps Grunt plucked the rifle from Eekyip's hands. "On a mission with Sub-Commander, 'Fesamee—that's him there," he gestured to one of the SpecOps Elites. His clawed finger lingered on one of the many sturdy, black-armored Elites. The officer was yelling something across the field to a group of SpecOps Grunts. Eekyip briefly marveled at how Rigreek could tell the Elites apart from so far away.

"The Unggoy were all issued fuel rods. Orgork, a member of my unit, dropped his in favor of a needler." He turned to Niplip. "Also destructive, but not so heavy. When 'Fesamee found out about his little trade-off, he clubbed Orgork over the head with his rifle, and ordered him to go back, alone, to get the fuel rod gun...We never saw Orgork again."

"Or the weapon," Mitmeer added coldly. The three Grunts stared at him a moment; Rigreek was the first to look away. He quickly examined his plasma rifle.

"Here..." He held the weapon out to Eekyip. Eekyip reached for the rifle reverently. "It's no fuel rod, but it's better than the little pea shooters we're issued." He nodded to Mitmeer and scurried off. He had spotted his two favorite officers and was eager to assist them.

Niplip wondered at the rifle for a moment. He made a frustrated noise.

"Lucky," he grunted. Eekyip smiled as he inspected the weapon.

Niplip's attention had turned to a particularly colorful dragonfly as it flitted on a nearby stone. Behind him, he heard Mitmeer sigh. He turned to examine the warrior Grunt and his suspicions were confirmed. Mitmeer held a plasma pistol ready in his hand, and he was equipped with several grenades, but that was all. Eekyip submitted the rifle to him.

"You should have this," he said genuinely.

"I don't need it," he answered without looking at the younger Grunt. Eekyip's arm lowered fractionally.

"You know how to use it better than me. It'sâ€•."

The SpecOps Trooper took the rifle from Eekyip, took aim quickly, and reduced the dragonfly to a particularly colorful bubbling paste. He glanced at the heat gauge on the side of the weapon as he turned to Eekyip.

"It's that simple." He dropped the weapon at Eekyip's feet and walked to a jagged ledge where he sat in solitude. At that moment, as Niplip made a series of distressed noises, something deep down told Eekyip to take Mitmeer more seriously.

Satisfied that the energy-core was stable and well put together, Special Operations Officer Bora 'Mozomee assembled his plasma rifle and turned it over to Rigreek. He secured a pistol at his hip and put a hand on Officer 'Ebamee's shoulder. "Say something kind to the Gruntlings, Iko," he suggested. "They won't last long out here." 'Ebamee frowned.

"Unggoy!" 'Mozomee beckoned. Both Minor Grunts stood at attention. "Come here, the both of you." The two Grunts looked at each other uncertainly for a moment, then Niplip scurried over to the two officers with Eekyip close behind. "I know that you are both new to our war...I just want to make sure you understand what is expected of you." He looked to 'Ebamee as if waiting for him to speak, but he never did. "I am Bora 'Mozomee, and this is Officer Iko 'Ebamee. How are you called?"

The Grunts didn't answer. No Elite had ever directly asked them their names.

"Well?" 'Ebamee growled. "What are your names?" He grew impatient with their tepidness. 'Mozomee laughed softly. Niplip nudged his friend.

"My name is Eekyip," he squeaked. 'Ebamee considered this.

"Eek_yip?...That sounds like a noise one makes when one has had too much to drink," 'Ebamee said flatly. Eekyip blinked.

"...Yes, Excellency," he replied. 'Mozomee began laughing uncontrollably and slapping 'Ebamee on the shoulder. 'Ebamee hardly noticed and turned his attention to the other Grunt.

"And you?" he inquired reluctantly.

"Niplip." 'Mozomee and 'Ebamee looked at each other for a moment before 'Mozomee continued to laugh loudly. 'Ebamee turned away from him and his demeanor changed. He smiled and chuckled softly. _Eekyip and Niplip._ Niplip laughed nervously and Eekyip shushed him.

"Excellent, then," 'Mozomee said, laughing.

"Listenâ€•calm yourself Boraâ€•we are infiltrating a human base to retrieve an important individual. Your part in this mission will be to guard the Phantom." He looked around for any sign of the shiny new drop ship. "It should not prove difficult." He jokingly slapped

'Mozomee in the back of the head. "You call yourself a warrior..."
'Mozomee straightened and made an effort to compose himself.

"Ah, there it is," 'Mozomee said, grinning. 'Ebamee saw the purple drop ship and allowed himself a satisfied chuckle.

"Well, there you have it. We will entrust it to you." 'Ebamee tore his gaze away from the fast approaching ship. He nodded at the Minor Unggoy and started to walk away. "Do have it looking presentable when we return with our human guest," he said over his shoulder. 'Mozomee began the loud cycle of making an ass out of himself all over again.

Four SpecOps Grunts stood patiently aboard the Phantom, along with Eekyip and Niplip who nervously paced and fiddled with their weapons.

"This is the area," Officer 'Mozomee told the pilot. "Send us down here." He then rejoined Officer 'Ebamee and added, "We will retrieve the human with relative ease." He had stated that as if trying to reassure the preoccupied officer. 'Ebamee only nodded.

The Phantom dropped closer and closer to a field and what appeared to be a bunker.

"Hm...this is unexpected," 'Mozomee commented, his positive demeanor unchanged. "It will be dark down there." Again, 'Ebamee merely nodded and removed his eye protectors.

Eekyip was briefly distracted by Iko 'Ebamee's golden eyes, but Rigreek's scratchy voice brought him back to reality.

"Once we set down, just follow my lead. As you've been told, we'll be guarding this vessel. Now, we'll have to do this from the field. Ya seeâ€•"

"Arrogant as the Elites may be, Officer 'Ebamee dislikes taking unnecessary risks." Mitmeer took it upon himself to sift through Rigreek's theatrics for the inexperienced Minors. Rigreek jumped in right away.

"Yes, and because they are short on Officers, they will need even the Elites capable of flying this craft," he finished dramatically as though he had just revealed some great truth to the younger soldiers. Eekyip was less than stunned.

"Can't either of you fly one of these ships?" he inquired. Niplip nodded enthusiastically and waited for Rigreek to answer. The trooper remained silent.

"Not well enough," Mitmeer said simply.

Disappointed, Niplip's gaze fell. However, he quickly became concerned with the painful burns on his hands. In a moderately pathetic attempt to revive the melted dragonfly, he had received a minor, but painful case of singed fingers.

"Like I said, stay close to me. I'll know what to do if any humans decide that they want to fire off their sloppy little projectiles"â€•he wiggled his fingers in a squeamish gestureâ€•"at

our taintless Phantom," he said with confidence. Eekyip's eyes narrowed. He'd seen what those projectiles were capable of.

"But I thought Officer 'Ebamee wanted us to stay close to the dropshipâ€•"

"Look, Rookie. I don't know how many SpecOps missions you've ever been on, but we"â€•he gestured at himself and the three other black-armored Grunts behind himâ€•"know how to defend a Phantom. You wanna try out your own method, fine, knock yourself outâ€•But don't come squealing to me when you're up to your neck in humans." Rigreek gave a short, sharp laugh that startled the timid Minor Grunts.

Eekyip grunted indignantly. "I'm not going to squeal."

The gravity lift dropped the six Sangheili right on top of the receding structure. Upon entering the metal bunker, the warriors made use of their active camouflage, but when human heat or motion sensory no doubt detected their presence, all light flooded out of the corridor. The SpecOps Elites continued on, unhindered by the dark.

The five Grunts gathered in a loose circle to the side of the Phantom. Eekyip maintained a considerable distance from Rigreek, therefore being separated from Niplip, who stuck close to the bossy SpecOps Trooper. Eekyip tried to stick with Mitmeer, but whenever he wasn't paying attention, the warrior would wander off on his own.

'Ebamee turned a corner and came face to face with a panicked human soldier. A thin stream of purple energy passed directly over his shoulder and through the human's head.

"As you were, Iko." 'Mozomee waved him forward.

"Be careful with that damn thing, Bora. You're going to put someone's eye out," 'Ebamee said in a feigned reproachful tone. 'Mozomee laughed quietly.

The black-armored Elites stealthily crept down another dark passage. 'Ebamee flattened himself against a wall and listened. 'Mozomee had been right behind him, but the other four Elites came up behind them.

"Shh..." 'Mozomee signaled them to stop. "Right here," he whispered. All seven Elites strained to hear anything going on the next room. What they heard was a deafening boom.

A round from a human pistol cut through the circle of uneasy Grunts and they scattered. Eekyip mistakenly went in the opposite direction of the dropship, and Niplip scampered along after Rigreek. Eekyip watched them, torn between longing for the companionship of his best friend and his desire to impress Officer 'Ebamee.

Eekyip reached for a plasma grenade.

"I'm not going to squeal," he told himself. He then activated the plasma grenade and accidently dropped it.
"...Uh-oh..."

"HWEE-hoo-hoo!" Eekyip squealed as he dove behind a lump of smoldering metal. The plasma grenade detonated behind him. "Wahâ€•!" he exclaimed feeling the heat of the explosion on his padded feet. He pressed his clawed hands so tightly around his head that the sounds of battle _almost_ grew quieter.

Just as he thought he would go into shock, a strong hand closed around his shoulder and lifted him to his feet in a fluid motion. The hand held him for a brief moment as he remembered standingâ€•a difficult techniqueâ€•and then shook him roughly. He reluctantly peered up at the superior officer, scrambling for the appropriate excuse, and faltered completely when he met the Elite's steely gaze. "Excellency!"

For Special Operations Officer Iko 'Ebamee, time slowed to a crawl as he patiently regarded the Unggoy. The _zurr_ of super-heated plasma buzzed in his ears, miniature mortar fire floated across the sky in delicate arches, and the Unggoy's rapid, wheezing breaths sounded almost normal, so sharp were the senses of the SpecOps Elite. However, the Unggoy had not merely slowed, he was frozen in place.

As a school of human projectiles swam over his energy shield, the officer scooped up the Grunt and, with a few short strides, cleared a rock ledge that Eekyip could have never aspired to scale with out a safety harness. His impressive hooves absorbed the shock of landing, but Eekyip felt it all the same. He heard explosives and gun shots behind them.

He saved me, Eekyip thought dumbly as the Elite set him sharply, but carefully on the ground. Officer Iko 'Ebamee may very well have died trying to save one lowly, worthless Grunt. Eekyip's mind raced. Was he worth more than a puny pistol and his weight in methane? Or perhaps Officer 'Ebamee had saved him simply because he was capable of doing so. As if any human could harm Iko 'Ebamee. He was overreacting. As far as this self-important warrior was concerned, Eekyip was a tool of war, cannon fodder, a mindlessâ€•

"Are you injured?" the Elite inquired speedily.

His deep voice rumbled through Eekyip's head like another explosion. His vocal chords hummed to life, but he could find no words, so "mmMMmmm" was all that came out. 'Ebamee glanced quizzically at the Grunt and proceeded to analyze the battle field: the remaining number of enemies, the remaining number of allies, possible escape routesâ€•the Unggoy looked fine to him.

Eekyip was almost hyperventilating. Not only was there a slight possibility that the Elite cared about him at all, but there was a good chance that the officer thought he was an idiot as well. And of course, there was the fact that he was in the middle of a battle. This was just too much. Eekyip promptly fainted.

It was fully a minute before Officer 'Ebamee noticed.

He'd decided to look the Unggoy over once more before making a run for the distant drop ship, did a double take, and nudged the Grunt firmly with his massive toe.

"Wake up, Unggoy!" 'Ebamee barked.

Eekyip nearly jumped out of his skin. He stood and took an uncertain step forward only to freeze up again as a human explosive fell at his feet, bounced once, and detonated.

Eekyip's vision slowly went back into focus and he found himself suddenly aware of everything around him. He was terribly dizzy and it was dark. A great mass of gray clouds had blotted out the sun and a rain drop pinged off his snout.

The ledge that he and Officer 'Ebamee had taken cover behind was gone, along with the ground beneath it. Officer 'Ebamee himself was kneeling on the ground next to him, his back to a massive boulder, diligently plucking shrapnel out of his side. His energy shields sparked. His armor was dotted with small slashes and purple blood was visible on his ribs. Eekyip was overcome with concern for him. However, when a large, tan-skinned human peeked round the boulder and aimed his rifle at 'Ebamee's head, Eekyip wasn't too overwhelmed to level his pistol and shoot him between the eyes. His hand trembled as he watched the human crumple to the ground.

'Ebamee slowly turned his head to look at the dead human and then to look at Eekyip. His shields went up in a rush of orange energy. "Well done," he said coldly and took up his energy blade.

"My rifle," he directed. The Grunt understood. In a fluid motion, Eekyip fixed his pistol to his side, swooped down on the Officer's discarded energy rifle, and closed the distance between himself and 'Ebamee, wondering at his own speed. With a practiced flick of his wrist, 'Ebamee swiftly activated the sword. He crouched low, set a reaffirming hand on Eekyip's shoulder and dashed forward. Eekyip followed close behind.

What must have been a suicidal human jumped in front of 'Ebamee, yelling savagely. With another delicate flick of his wrist, the SpecOps Elite cut him neatly in two. A short human stood between the two Covenant soldiers and the dormant Phantom. The Earthling panicked and threw a fragmentation grenade. It bounced toward the two soldiers.

'Ebamee swung up, smacking the grenade aside with the heel of his hand, and brought the blade down with a roar, straight through the human's torso. The wayward frag flew shortly and detonated near a squad of humans. Their screams and bits of shrapnel filled the air. A few stray shreds gained on Eekyip and he prepared to hit the dirt, but 'Ebamee came to his rescue. The Elite tossed his energy sword from one hand to the other and swung Eekyip to his side, sheltering him as his energy shields took the blow.

A shot rang out and 'Ebamee's shields drained completely. Several humans had formed an expedient blockade ahead of them. They brought their rifles to bear. 'Ebamee growled, but they were out of his range. Eekyip lacked the skill to score a direct hit from the current distance, but the human's didn't know that. He brought up both of his borrowed plasma rifles and fired into the mass of humans. As he'd hoped, they took cover from the rapid fire and 'Ebamee was able to pass by unscathed. Just as his shields recharged, the humans recovered from the unexpected plasma fire.

"Who the hell ever heard of a goddamn duel wielding _Grunt_?" one of the humans yelled after them.

Close behind them, Eekyip could here the thump of Battle Rifles as 'Ebamee's shields were chipped away. 'Ebamee kept his eye on the drop ship, just a few feet away, blocking out the incessant beeping as his shields depleted. In the corner of his vision, Eekyip watched a blinding blue-white light soar through the air and fuse to the leg of a screaming human. 'Ebamee grinned at the resounding explosion, anticipating the next sound he would hear.

"Iko!" Officer 'Mozomee half-cheered.

'Ebamee laughed triumphantly as he set foot aboard the Phantom. He set Eekyip down with a clank. With one hand he manned the turret auto-targeting system, and with the other he initiated a transmission. What Eekyip could only make out as a distraught Elite roared through the speakers.

"'Ebamee, are you there? What happened? Did you capture the human?" Officer 'Ebamee frowned.

"Commander, as my unit infiltrated the base, the human took his own life..." he confessed. The Elite growled.

"Cowardly swine..." What was probably the Elite's fist slamming down on a solid surface transferred loudly. Outside, the Phantom's plasma turrets were reducing the battle to an extermination. The sound must have carried over. "Officer 'Ebamee. Report to me in full after the battle." The transmission canceled. 'Ebamee left the drop ship. Eekyip sighed. It was just about over.

A panic-stricken human backed in to the massive Elite and fired his weapon madly in random directions. 'Ebamee clubbed him over the head with his deactivated energy sword. With a final glance at the battle field he prepared to board the drop ship once again. "Unggoy," he called.

The Unggoy was scanning the field, anxiously.

"Wait, Excellency! I have to find..." Eekyip trailed off. 'Ebamee winced. Not far in front of him Officer 'Mozomee was crouching over the limp body of a yellow-armored Grunt.

"My friendâ€•" Eekyip choked out, tears welling in his eyes. He ran as fast as he could, but that wasn't fast enough. A tear rolled down his cheek. He dropped to the ground next to his friend. He just wasn't prepared to see Niplip lying in a pool of blood. The naÃ¬ve Grunt was always so positive and enthusiastic, so good natured.

'Mozomee gave 'Ebamee a solemn pat on the shoulder in passing. Officer 'Ebamee watched over Eekyip as he fended off the SpecOps Grunt who had come to relieve his fallen comrade of his pistol, growling low and dangerously. He placed a firm hand on the Minor Unggoy's arm. Eekyip looked up at him revealing his tear streaked face.

"It's not fair!" Eekyip hissed. He sniffed as 'Ebamee's grip tightened. "He didn't deserve to die like this. Heâ€•" The Grunt

whimpered as 'Ebamee pulled him to his feet.

"I know, little one...Secure that weapon. Tomorrow, you will have the chance to fight for him." It wasn't much, but 'Ebamee was sure that there was nothing more he could say to the Unggoy to ease the pain of his loss. So he just observed.

Eekyip, trembling with rage, watched Rigreek hobble across the field, the field stained with Niplip's blood. Eekyip reverently policed Niplip's pistol.

"Eekyip." He greeted him as he approached. "Your alive..." He laid eyes on Niplip's body. "Oh." Eekyip glared at him. Was that all, just _"oh" _?

"You said you would take care of him," he said in a low voice, made gruff by angry tears. The SpecOps Trooper looked shocked by the accusation, but he recovered.

"Well, I'm sorry if he couldn't keep up with me," Rigreek replied rather genuinely•then his voice took on that theatrical tone again. "My job is to follow orders and kill humans, not babysit rookies."

Eekyip's glare intensified. There were so many things he wanted to scream at him, all running together as one in his mind, so he just slammed his fist into Rigreek's mouth. 'Ebamee pretended not to notice.

The black-armored Grunt fell over on his back. His head was spinning and he could taste his own blood against the breathing apparatus. Mitmeer was watching Eekyip board the drop ship with Officer 'Ebamee. Rigreek looked up at him sputtering.

"Are you just going t •"

"I'm honestly surprised no one's done it before now," the solemn Grunt replied without even looking at him.

o

_The first Halo fic I read in a while that sort of inspired me to write this story is called __Reconciled Brother__ by Dechandel663. It has 18 chapters and it was a really good story._

_Hope you liked it! _

3. Warming Up

J. Bittersweet::with Eekyip in her lap:: -Hey everybody. We've made it to yet another exciting chapter of Unggoy are from blah-blah-blah.

Eekyip::squeals joyfully::

J: HAHABA! _Within 2 weeks_, I said! Oh, man... sorry about that. -See, Eek? 13 reviews. They love you.

Eekyip::smiles cutely:: I love them too!

J: And if it weren't for me you'd still be in the dark recesses of my busted up old DELL. ::picks Eek up Simba style::

Eekyip::looks confused:: If it weren't for you I wouldn't even exist.

J: Yep, that too. So go get me an energy drink, ya ungrateful brat. ::drops him::

Eekyip: Yes, mommy.

J: Now then, about those reviews:

**Razorblade Love**: I liked your story very much! (this much ::holds arms out::) I hope you write more.

Eekyip::from the kitchen:: I liked it too!

**Darth Baka**: Thanks. I hope to write more of it. ::grin::

**Metal Mangalarga Marchardor**: Aw, that's too bad. ...god I hate screaming children. I guess I'm a bad person. Thanks so much, I'm glad you like it!

**Amy Majin**: lmao I love your story so much, you are crazy::rereads awesome super-long review:: -Ya hear that, mofo?

'Ebamee::polishes his plasma rifle like he isn't paying attention, but you can totally see him smiling::

She says your hawt! -Yeah, he knows. Iko, give her your phonenumber!

'Ebamee::smirks and ignores her::

Heehee.

Man, I don't know about Yayap, cause he seemed pretty smart, but in my expert oppinion::puts glasses on:: 'Zamamee was definitely crushing on the grunt. Like when he was all "wort wort wort- and then I'll deal with that tiresome Yayap wort wort-" what he really meant was, I'm gonna take him back to my place, light some candles and, you know...wort wort wort. ::takes glasses off::
lol

AccidentalSuicideBomber: Hey, yourself! Where's chapter 2 of Love and War at? I'm waiting for that! ...I know I haven't reviewed that yet, because I wrote on the back what I was gonna say... so you can expect a review...if you don't see it in two days you should stab me...in the jaw. Yep, that's what I would do.

**Drodjan**: Thank you very much! I'm glad you like it.

_**Animaeu**__s_: I know, I'm trying to read you're story, but I guess I'm gonna have to print it out if I want to actually finish reading. Hope I remember to review.

****Zim fan 101****: I am working on toning the wierdness down (but I will probably not succeed -) I hope you like it, took me long enough trying to get it right.

****RIP****: Hahaha! Yes, you are not alone. And when I find some more Grunt/Elite stories I will tell you guys.

-

Eekyip: brings Tab

Thank you, sweetie.

Eekyip::climbs on to Bittersweet's lap::

Okay! Without any further blathering from J. Bitta'sweet, (see closing for blathering)-

****---o---****

Chapter 3 : Warming Up

****---o---****

Niplip tripped over a half-buried stone and stumbled, but he kept running. In a blue-white flash, a plasma grenade exploded. The Minor cast a worried look over his shoulder.

_"I hope Eekyip will be okay!" he said helplessly. _

When no reply came he turned back around. A bullet skimmed off his combat harness bringing his attention sharply back to his own well-being. Rigreek was in front of him, scurrying away from the sounds of battle in a very un-heroic fashion. Niplip looked confused, but he followed the more experienced soldier. Ahead, Rigreek had taken cover behind an overturned Warthog. He primed a plasma grenade and blindly tossed it over the edge of the vehicle.

Niplip took a hurried step towards him, but a sudden impact on his left shoulder sent him spinning to the ground. There was a split second of intense pain. After that he simply couldn't will himself to move. The human LRV exploded and Rigreek leapt away. Niplip was dimly aware of footsteps coming towards him and then a battle rifle being pointed at his head.

"Help...Rigreekâ€•"

"Rigreek, wait!" Eekyip cried out, uncurling completely from his sleeping position.

In his peripheral vision, he saw the SpecOps Trooper staring at him in shock.

Eekyip turned away from him. He squeezed his eyes shut, his face flushing indigo. When he opened his eyes, he jumped, realizing he'd fallen asleep on the edge of a cliff face. He crawled backwards away from the ledge. As he tried to regain his composure he heard Rigreek snickering and whispering to one of his companions. The Minor carefully peered over the edge of the ridge. It wasn't a terribly

long way down. In the valley below, the Elites were busy pitching their sleek, warm tents.

We're going to be here for awhile, he thought.

He scanned his own Grunt section tiredly. Rigreek sat in front of two bored looking SpecOps Troopers. One was larger than Rigreek and one who was almost as small as Eekyip. He grumbled about the standard infantry Grunts being a disgrace, waving his rifle about for emphasis. Eekyip rolled his eyes. Farther up on the plateau, a circle of red-armored Grunts chatted or nodded off with weapons in their laps. They looked unhappy and Eekyip wasn't particularly interested in their disdain. Past them, he spotted the warrior Grunt, and struggled to remember his name.

Rigreek had introduced him to the quiet SpecOps Trooper cordially•and he had been less than friendly•but he had demonstrated the correct use of an energy rifle. Eekyip also remembered the warrior had placed himself in Rigreek's path right after he'd hit the bastard...right after•

...Mitmeer, that's what it was. Eekyip stood, deciding that Mitmeer had showed him more real kindness than anyone else around, and walked towards him.

Mitmeer began to stray from the group of chatty soldiers. Eekyip waddled up behind the imposing Grunt. Mitmeer peered over his shoulder at his follower.

"Take me with you," Eekyip urged him, recalling how Mitmeer had evaded him before. Mitmeer's eyes narrowed into a skeptical stare.

"Why?" he asked slowly, his tone revealing that he didn't trust the Minor. He remained still and watched Eekyip carefully. Eekyip took a step towards the loner; Mitmeer almost reflexively stepped back, but stopped himself. "You're barking up the wrong tree, kid. Stick with your hero, Rigreek the Wonder Grunt, or whatever the hell he's calling himself these days..." He started to turn away.

"You taught me how to use a rifle•" the Minor argued.

"Now, I didn't•" the SpecOps Trooper started to protest.

"•And it saved my life..." Eekyip said gratefully. "If anybody should be my hero, it's you. Take me with you this time. Please." Mitmeer considered this.

"...No...You've got the wrong guy." He turned his body from the smaller Grunt but couldn't tear his gaze away. "I'm not like Rigreek...I won't promise•"

"Good. _With_ respect, Mitmeer, I'm not looking for a hero, I'm looking for a teacher." The SpecOps Grunt's eyes widened fractionally. "I hate how weak Grunts are," the Minor muttered bitterly. Mitmeer's eyes quickly narrowed again.

"We weren't always." His voice was laced with annoyance. "Why me?" Eekyip looked confused at the question.

"What do you mean?" he asked, tilting his head.

"If Grunts are so weak, go get 'Ebamee to keep you alive. It works well enough for Rigreek," Mitmeer said, attempting to dismiss the newcomer—but Eekyip had made up his mind.

"I don't want to be like Rigreek! I. Want. To. Be. Like. You." The Minor was exasperated; Mitmeer was almost amused.

"Why's that?" he asked with a newfound patience.

"...I want to be good—good enough to make a difference. I know I'll never be as good as you, but I'd at least like to know what I'm doing—"

"Have you checked your weapon today?" Mitmeer asked suddenly. Startled, Eekyip peered down at his pistol or, rather, Niplip's pistol. He had lent his to a wounded Elite in need of yet another weapon.

"Examine it, quick-like, and have it ready," the Commando advised. Mitmeer continued on his path. "Always have your weapon ready to fire. Always." Eekyip looked his pistol over and shoved it back into his harness, scrambling down the path after the warrior.

The two Grunts walked silently through the thick underbrush.

"Pay attention," Mitmeer said.

"But...you weren't saying anything." Eekyip was slightly annoyed by the unexpected correction, but it didn't show.

"Pay attention to your surroundings," Mitmeer said calmly. Eekyip cautiously scanned the sloping terrain.

"Birds, trees, rocks, rocks, rocks..." He inhaled deeply. "Rocks..." Mitmeer sighed again.

"And...?" he prompted the smaller Grunt.

"...the sky—?"

"Backpedal," Mitmeer cut him off. "What about the rocks?"

"There are _many_" the Minor ventured.

"And that means?" the SpecOps Grunt asked. He stepped over a branch that Eekyip had to duck under. He composed himself and found his train of thought. Eekyip strained mentally for a moment before his mind began to work.

"Ooooooh! There could be, um..."

"...humans," Mitmeer provided.

"Hiding in them! ...Right?" Eekyip looked hopeful. Mitmeer nodded, a bored look on his face.

"There ya go."

"Sooo, someone should check it out," he suggested. Mitmeer sighed.

"That's what I'm doing."

"Youâ€•" Eekyip looked stunned for a moment. "Who told you to do that?" he said in mild disbelief. Mitmeer looked confused.

"No one, it just needed to be done," he explained simply.

"Sooo...what do you do if you find any?" Eekyip asked the warrior.

There was a sudden rustle in the bushes left of their position. Eekyip raised his plasma pistol in an erratic manner.

"Hopefully"â€•Mitmeer charged his own pistol expertlyâ€•"I kill them." He cautiously approached the suspicious bushes. The dark, thick foliage could have concealed anything. Eekyip was getting very nervous.

"Hopefully...? But...you would normally kill them, right?" he inquired anxiously. Mitmeer growled.

"Yes, Rookie, normally I would, unless I am being followed by an extremely talkative rookie, and then they normally kill me," the Commando hissed.

Hearing the sudden outburst from the stoic SpecOps Grunt, Eekyip's wide eyes widened exponentially.

"Wait...If they'd killed youâ€•"

"Shut up!"

A four-winged butterfly-bird shot out of the bush. Eekyip successfully withstood fainting and breathed a sigh of relief, but Mitmeer continued to stare at the coniferous bush warily.

"Rookie..." Mitmeer gestured at his overcharged plasma pistol. Eekyip gulped and raised his pistol to eye level again. He pulled the trigger and held it down so that the energy gathered at the mouth of the weapon. It glowed green and trembled in Eekyip's nervous hands.

The bushes quivered fractionally and Mitmeer's eyes narrowed into slits. He could feel waves of anxiety rolling off of Eekyip. Stress was a good thing, but the Rookie wasn't focused, just terrified.

"This is one of the things that killed your friend," Mitmeer said in a hushed tone. Eekyip's eyes widened, then narrowed into a dangerous glare. His hand shook fiercely, whether from fear or wrath, Mitmeer wasn't entirely sure.

Snap!

A branch cracked behind the foliage. Three humans sprung, firing their BR55 battle rifles in the general direction of the two Grunts. Mitmeer's boiling green plasma bolt hit the first one in the forehead, the impact throwing him to the ground. Eekyip's bolt hit the second target in the throat, burning a hole through his neck. The human gagged and spat blood as he fell to his knees. The third human didn't stand around waiting for the pistols to stabilize. He fired his weapon at the yellow-armored Grunt.

In a blur, Mitmeer shoved Eekyip aside, snatching his forgotten energy rifle. He took the clump of human projectiles in the shoulder and blue blood gushed from the wound, but he didn't flinch. He brought up the rifle, barely wincing as another swarm of bullets slashed at his neck, and fired a rapid stream of ghostly blue plasma that struck the third human under the chin and knocked him on his back. Mitmeer's weapon tracked him as he fell. The human's leg moved and the SpecOps Grunt fired another burst into his chest. He didn't move again. Mitmeer calmly glanced at his motion tracker.

"No human presence detected..." he said in an even, almost artificial tone. The trooper dropped the rifle in front of Eekyip. He bent to retrieve his own pistol and secured it at his waist. Eekyip watched the black-armored Grunt in astonishment. His left arm hung uselessly at his side, neon blood dripping from his claws. He pressed his good hand over his other wound. Eekyip was concerned about the bullet wounds on his neck, but Mitmeer was so strangely calm.

"Come on, Rookie," Mitmeer sighed and took a look around before starting back in the direction that they had come.

"Will you be alright?" Eekyip asked quietly, his voice trembled with lingering adrenaline. Mitmeer held his neck tightly, an exhausted expression suddenly on his face.

"I'll be fine...once we get back."

Eekyip scooped up the plasma rifle cautiously and followed Mitmeer closely.

It had all happened so fast. Mitmeer had saved his life, but he had almost been killed in the process. He could have died. Why?...What happened?

All the way back to camp, not once did his attention stray to clouds or birds. He never took his eyes off of the injured warrior, and the look of worry never left his face.

Back at base camp, Mitmeer's wounds were cleaned and bandaged, and he was given a drink and a capsule to swallow that would speed the healing process. Mitmeer calmly reported that they had encountered a small human patrol who had fired on them. He had killed two of them, and the Minor had eliminated the third threat. Officer Bora 'Mozomee clapped Eekyip fiercely on the back.

"Another close combat kill," Officer 'Ebamee nodded in approval. "This one has potential, Mitmeer...he rather reminds me of you when

you first joined us," 'Ebamee had said, eyes gleaming with subdued mischief. 'Mozomee stifled an obvious chuckle.

"Oh, why thank you, Excellency," the SpecOps Trooper had replied quietly, sarcastically—and then buried his snout in his drink, sulking.

As the Officer's departed, Rigreek lagged behind them. He looked Eekyip square in the eye and smirked. He was almost a head taller than the Minor and Eekyip's sunny yellow-armor was the polar opposite of Rigreek's intimidating black.

"I guess you think you're a Commando now, huh, Rookie? 'Cause you killed a human?" His tone was dangerous and taunting.

"Two," said Mitmeer.

Rigreek cut his eye at the injured Grunt. Mitmeer was leaning against a porous boulder, his neck craned back in a pose that aimed for relaxed.

"Come again?" Rigreek said flatly.

"He's killed two humans..." said Mitmeer. He opened one eye to look at Rigreek. "To my knowledge—"

Rigreek brushed him off.

"You know you can stop makin' googoo eyes at 'Ebamee any time now. Unless they made you an honorary Elite when I wasn't looking, he doesn't _give_ a damn about you."

Eekyip's eyes narrowed and he cast an uncertain glance at Mitmeer, who sipped his drink. He fought for control of his legs, they wanted so badly to put as much distance between them and Rigreek as possible...but Eekyip was proud of himself for the first time—as far back as he could remember. He hesitated a moment.

What the hell?

"You sure you're not just jealous?" Eekyip said coolly. "I don't think I've ever heard Officer 'Ebamee praise _you_." He thought he heard Mitmeer choke, but Rigreek's reaction demanded his attention. The Trooper lunged for him, his hands in angry fists.

"You're not gonna be around long enough to hear another word out of him, you cocky little—" He froze. Somehow, without either of them noticing, Mitmeer had swiftly placed himself in front of the yellow-armored Grunt. "_Mitmeer_," Rigreek growled in irritation glowering at him fiercely. Not intimidated, Mitmeer gave him an appraising look. A moment passed and Rigreek disengaged. He hobbled off in the direction the two Officers had gone, casting a glare at Eekyip as he went.

Mitmeer calmly settled back in his seat, as though there hadn't been an incident. Eekyip felt like he should thank the warrior, but Mitmeer looked exhausted, so the Minor held his peace.

Eekyip fell face first in to the mud.

"Get up, you patheticâ€•" an Elite trainer barked at him.

Hungry and out of breath, Eekyip scrambled to a suitable position and started off again. He wasn't trying to get beaten up again like yesterdayâ€•not ever again. He winced involuntarily.

A dark red-armored Elite watched over the Minor Grunts. Instructor 'Daseemee was well enough respected among the lowly Elites assigned the laughable task of training Grunts for battle. But he was miserable, and every Grunt in the facility knew it all too well. He was violent, cruel, and perhaps mentally unstable; accordingly, Eekyip was petrified of him. During his time spent at the facility, Eekyip had been kicked, thrown, strangled, clubbed, and electrocuted under the command of the Instructor.

All around him Grunts had fallen, unable to run anymore. Eekyip couldn't understand the purpose of this exercise, but they were made to do it everyday. He tried to come to terms with it. Oh, well, he reasoned, it wasn't like they were going to kill him if he stopped. He started to sink to his knees.

"Don't give up!" came a welcome, squeaky voice. "You're doing great, don't give up now!" A Grunt his size urged him. "We're almost done, keep running! Um...it's always darkest just before dawn! That's what my mom says." Unlike the majority of Grunts at preparation camp, Niplip didn't even look sad when he talked about his family. He only seemed to remember them fondly. Eekyip thought he probably even expected to see them again. Poor guy. He stood up unsteadily, and they ran until Instructor 'Daseemee yelled for them to sit down and meditate on how useless they were, like he did every morning.

"Ah, the motivational speaker," Eekyip said and collapsed in a heap.

"So," Niplip began, taking in a deep breath. "Why do you think 'Daseemee makes us do this every morning? We never get any better at it..." Eekyip sat up and smiled, despite his fatigue.

"Probably because he's flipping crazy," Eekyip said half-seriously.

_A disciplinary metal rod came crashing down on his headâ€• _

Eekyip awoke with a start, shivering and rubbing his arms. The rocky ledge provided no shelter from the raging wind. He rocked gently back and forth as he stared longingly at the Elite camp below. He wished Niplip were there to take his mind off of the cold. Eekyip wasn't fond of cold weather, he'd been brought up in a mild climate, and that's what he preferred.

To his left, Rigreek had dozed offâ€•but Eekyip had to commend him for trying to look alert, unlike the rest of the squad, curled up in a ball. Looking past Rigreek, Eekyip saw Mitmeer. He seemed to have fallen asleep with his eyes open. Deep in thought, he didn't notice the smaller Grunt inching towards him, rubbing his arms. A chill ran up Eekyip's spine and he shivered violently for a moment.

He was suddenly so unbearably cold.

And he thought maybe the soldier wouldn't notice.

If...

...he...

...justâ€•

"_What_ the hell are you doing?"

Eekyip winced and looked up. Mitmeer was suddenly very aware of the Minor snuggling into his side. His eyes were deep, dark green, and, like the harsh weather, chilled Eekyip to the bone. The Commando looked annoyed but not necessarily angry, so Eekyip pushed.

"I was just really cold and I couldn't sleeâ€•"

"You're really what?" Mitmeer asked flatly.

Eekyip's gaze dropped. If he wanted to impress Mitmeer, admitting that he couldn't take the cold was probably not the best way to do it. He leaned back on his hands and began to crab-walk away, but fell over the Trooper's surveillance equipment. Mitmeer pulled Eekyip off the delicate equipment and allowed the yellow-armored Grunt to lean into him. The soldier wasn't much warmer than the ground beneath them, but at least his body shielded Eekyip from the constant wind.

"You're not supposed to be sleeping _anyhow_..." the larger Grunt mumbled and cast an irritated glance at Rigreek. The Trooper had fallen over and was snoring. "Of course nobody's really setting a good example..."

Eekyip shuddered and pressed closer to Mitmeer.

"I'd rather follow you're example," he breathed. "That way at least I know I'm doing something right." Mitmeer looked down at him with an expression that was nearly unreadable in the dim pre-dawn light, and looked away. A moment later Eekyip considered he might have embarrassed the reserved SpecOps Grunt.

Mitmeer exhaled sharply in a show of disdain.

"If he heard Iko 'Ebamee coming, he'd sure as hell perk up."

Rigreek snored loudly. Eekyip didn't try to suppress a small laugh.

"Yes, you're most Excellent one!" Mitmeer squealed in his best Rigreek impersonation. "I kept a careful watch throughout the night, but no human dared come within a hundred leagues of your magnificence," he finished dramatically. Eekyip giggled at Mitmeer's uncharacteristically playful sarcasm.

"That's what he'll say?" Eekyip asked.

"...yeah, something like that," Mitmeer said, looking off into the distance with a distracted smile lingering on his features.

"Hey," Eekyip began. "I forgot to thank youâ€•"

"I don't need 'Ebamee in my face because I let Rigreek kill his little prodigy." Mitmeer made short work of the potential conversation. Eekyip frowned. He wasn't sure he liked Mitmeer's choice of words. As if sensing this, the SpecOps Grunt smoothly added, "And besides that, the only back up I can get my hands on."

>"Really?" Eekyip asked.<p>

"Yeah," Mitmeer confirmed. "You think I go on patrol by myself because I like the solitude?" He asked. Eekyip pondered saying yes before Mitmeer decided to save him the trouble. "Well, yeah, maybeâ€•but that's not the main reason."

"What's the main reason?"

"Well, I'm sure Wonder Grunt wouldn't mind, but...he's a terrible shot," Mitmeer said with a pained expression, as though it hurt to think about Rigreek's aim.

"Rigreek can't shoot straight?" Eekyip looked interested. Mitmeer literally looked down his nose at the Minor. Then he smiled.

"Rookie, there's only three Grunts in this whole damn valley that can shoot straight. One of 'em is way over there." He pointed to the ridge on the opposite edge of the valley. He turned back to Eekyip. "You're lookin' at one, and I'm lookin' at one." He then looked off over the hills. Eekyip stared at him, replaying the words in his mind.

"Me?" he squeaked. Mitmeer grinned absently.

"Thatta boy, Rookie." He patted Eekyip on the shoulder a little roughly. "That's problem solving."

Eekyip looked out over the cliff ledge, trying to see whatever Mitmeer found so interesting. They sat there for awhile just staring...Eekyip occasionally became distracted with the starsâ€•much more benevolent than clouds, he decided...

Finally, Eekyip saw somethingâ€•a dust cloud rising up over the ridge.

The silent SpecOp Grunt's eyes narrowed.

"What is it, Mitmeer?" Eekyip was entranced by the swirling trails of earth-colored smoke.

"A vehicle," Mitmeer said flatly. "A big one."

The equipment behind Eekyip started to beep at an increasing volume and pitch. Mitmeer rose and pulled a clear, glowing lever on the violet-colored machine and in the valley below, a deep warbling alarm stirred the lounging Elites from their tents.

"Wake up, Rigreek," Mitmeer growled, nudging the Grunt firmly with his foot.

Rigreek jumped up in response. He first scanned the sky and then the camp below for any threat. When he found none, he cast Mitmeer an accusing look. Mitmeer gestured over the ridge and Rigreek's eyes widened as they fell on the dust. False heroics abandoned, he skittered about raising the sleeping Grunts urgently.

"Rigreek!" came a deep rattling voice from the bottom of the slope.

Mitmeer leaned over the edge and called down.

"Sir, human heavy assault vehicles on approach," he told Officer 'Mozomee calmly. 'Ebamee jogged up behind his partner and pointed to the growing dust-cloud.

"Are they alone?" 'Ebamee yelled over the alarm.

"Unknown," Mitmeer said, his face grim, and awaited his orders. 'Ebamee frowned.

"Man the plasma turrets and give us some cover. Keep your fire on the tanks," he told the level-headed Grunt.

"Yes sir," Mitmeer replied. The Officers turned to leave.

"Rigreek!" Officer 'Mozomee yelled over his shoulder. The Trooper scurried down the path after the two Officers.

"Alright, man the Shades! Cover the Elites!" Mitmeer waved for Eekyip to follow him.

"Man the what?" said Eekyip.

"I'll show you," the other Trooper said over his shoulder.

At the top of the ridge, Eekyip sat up in his Shade mounted plasma turret, squeezing the firing yokes lightly the way Mitmeer showed him. Through his holo-graphic targeting screen, he watched the Scorpion battle tanks crawl into view. With their long-barreled guns and sluggishly rotating treads, they looked like lazy monsters coming to devour the Covenant camp. He lined up his shot with the nearest target and waited for the tank to come into firing range. Mitmeer stood beside him—his injury prevented him from operating a Shade. Eekyip found himself glancing frequently to his right, to Mitmeer, for reassurance.

Vroooooooooommm!

A human reconnaissance vehicle zoomed by in the passage below.

!

The chain-gun mounted on the back of the vehicle unleashed a deafening volley of razor-edged projectiles. A mix of troops had formed a phalanx at the entrance to the valley, but their combined energy shields would do little against the speeding vehicle and its

chain-gun.

The gunner to Eekyip's left took a trio of bullets to his face and did a back flip. Eekyip watched in horror as a new Grunt, immediately and without remorse, replaced him.

According to Mitmeer's instructions, he kept his turret trained on the closing Scorpion tank. When the floating triangle indicator glowed crimson, he yanked down on the firing sticks and blue-purple lights splashed over the tanks armored extremities. A pumping _zirr_ from his left alerted him that the fresh gunner was well suited for shade operation. His lance of violet plasma sliced through the scorpion's long gun.

The injured Mitmeer smiled.

"C'mon, Nailay find something more challenging!" Mitmeer yelled over the shade-fire. Nailay jumped in his seat. "The Rookie can handle the tanksâ€•you take care of the quick little bastards down there slicin' up our infantry!"

"Acquiring target!" the neurotic Trooper replied. He tracked a racing LRV as it weaved in and out of the line of sluggish tanks. With a quick jerk, he sent forth a stream of violet plasma that sliced straight through the front of the vehicle, killing the driver and passenger, another quick burst impacted on what remained of the oncoming vehicle, melting the tires. The LRV flipped end over end, tossing the gunner free before the chain gun crushed in to a protruding rock. Nailay immediately sought a new target.

Mitmeer lobbed a plasma grenade over Eekyip's head and the Minor whirled around to track the energy bomb as it sailed off. Under his facemask the Rookie's mouth fell open. He couldn't throw half as far or as straight as the injured SpecOps Trooper. The grenade finally found a target just below the long, imposing gun of a human tank. Even the shocking explosion seemed dwarfed by the vehicle's size. The hatch under the cannon burst open and a coughing human was revealed. Then a stream of purple light sliced through the dust-clouded air, and the human disappeared back into the metal monster. The tank swerved sideways and smashed in to a passing Warthog. The two ex-vehicles flashed into red and orange balls of flame.

Eekyip had never seen the decimating purple beam on the field and turned to Mitmeer for answers. The injured Grunt smiled knowingly and nodded over Eekyip's shoulder. The Minor turned and searched a moment. From a ledge overlooking the pass, Bora 'Mozomee was surveying the battle. With Rigreek as his spotter, 'Mozomee was taking advantage of the enemies every mistake. He held up his hand in a gesture to Mitmeer and went back to work. He handled his particle beam rifle expertly and Eekyip watched him fire several shots in succession without the weapon overheating.

Eekyip went back to his task. After relentlessly firing upon it, the Minor slagged a Scorpion tank's left treads and the thing slowed to a halt. Plasma fire rained down on the helpless target from all directions. He then caught sight of yet another tank. It was closer than any of the others had been.

Mitmeer sized up the approaching threat. The tank was headed straight for the shield team. He couldn't pull his comfortable long-range

trick. He'd have to take the sliding behemoth out right where it was. He gripped the Minor's wrist with his good hand.

"Aim for that tank. Keep your fire on the left treads and don't hit me for the love of Balaho!" He broke away and swiftly hopped down to the next ridge.

Mitmeer was suddenly scurrying about in the pass below and Eekyip struggled to recall his directions as his adrenaline picked up. While he watched Mitmeer weave between burning remains, Eekyip followed his route with the shades targeting reticule.

Mitmeer reached the target and, with some effort, hoisted himself over the roof of the massive assault vehicle and ducked under the long barrel of the Scorpion's cannon. Crouching low for stability, he brought up his plasma pistol and fired three shots at the hatch before kicking it open. A shocked human face looked up at him, exposed, just as he primed a plasma grenade and dropped it into the narrow opening. He leapt from the tank and landed roughly on the ground. The human's screams were drowned out by the violent explosion of the Scorpion tank.

The sight of the separated and tilting cannon was enough incentive for Mitmeer to move his injured body. He lunged forward and rolled seconds before the massive parts slammed into the ground next to him and sank partially into the hard-packed dirt.

A flaming warthog came straight at him. The combined fire of Eekyip and Nailay took out the driver and slagged the controls. The vehicle rolled to a stop, inches from Mitmeer's face. When the gunner came to his senses, he took careful aim at him—and was sliced into three or four pieces by the concentrated fire of the two shade guns.

Mitmeer sighed and lay down in the dirt.

Eekyip wiggled out of his seat and scrambled down the path to his friend's side.

"Mitmeer! Mitmeer!" he squeaked. "Are you alright?" He kneeled next to the fallen Grunt. "That was a big jump for an Unggoy," he said incredulously.

"I'm fine," he grumbled and took Eekyip's hand. The Minor allowed the black-armored Grunt to use him as a crutch.

"I'm not a medic or anything, but I think you should take it easy for awhile," Eekyip said with a warm smile. Mitmeer looked down at his arm, dripping with blue blood from where his bullet wounds had re-opened.

"Yeah I guess..." Mitmeer replied—and lost consciousness.

---o---

...So that was chapter 3. Chapter 4 will be out very shortly, which in Halo/bungie terms is, like, - before next fall. But for real. About a week, okay? I'm gonna set high standards for myself and say I'm one third done with it...what I have of it so far is like the size of chapter 2, so I've got more work to do.

-do you guys ever get confused reading this? Because if I didn't know exactly (well, mostly) what was going on, I would be like _Seriously what does that even mean? What the hell is going on? _...(I do say that sometimes, but still-) ...my bad, I guess.

-

Yo, who's read the Halo Graphic Novel?

Is it just me or does the Commander have a super nice ass.

Seriously check it out.

I might have to change my penname to bootylicious half-jaw.
lmao

...wtf, seriously? What's wrong with me...?

Thanks for reading!

4. Heroes

Alright guys, I'm gonna have to break your hearts hereâ€|'Ebamee's not gonna have a big part in this chapter, BUT- in chapter 5, he will have a big part, in the middle of one of Eekyip's parts, and- waitâ€|a big part in Eekyip's-

Eekyip: :blushes:

Whoa, no... Not like thatâ€|anyway. How bout those reviews!

Majin Amy: Heeheehee! Seriously 'Ebamee is such a whore. He tries to act all righteous and noble, but here he is fancying a grunt and foolin' around with his best friend during combat training!

'Ebamee: You said that was confidential!

Shut up and say hi to your fan.

'Ebamee: :clears throat: Yes, sweet Amy. I do enjoy being drooled over occasionally.

And as for the ass slapping- fire at will! I'm sure he's used to it.

'Ebamee: Hey!

heehee. It would appear that Rigreek has a thing for 'Ebamee, yea? â€" notice, Mitmeer actually ignores Eekyip's crush on 'Ebamee.
winkwink

Eekyip: :cutely: Whyyy?

:to Eekyip: don't know, sweetie.

'Ebamee: â€|but you're the author, you know everything-

Thanx for reviewing! Xoxo!

'Ebamee: xoâ€|

****RIP****: Thankyou! I always thought my fight scenes kinda sucked, but I'm really glad you like them!

****_Animaeus_****: WOW, you reviewed right away! I was like, "Ehh, what the hell. I'll check and see if anyone reviewed"- and it was like 14 reviews, and I was like OhMaGod! Ha. Thanks.

â€|Mitmeer, I know you're not listening to fall out boy!

Mitmeer: :takes off earphones: huh? No, of course not, I live and breathe hard coreâ€|

Haha. You emo Grunt!

Okay, if I missed anybodyâ€| MY BAD. I wanted to get this out right away. Hope you like.

****_Unggoy are from Venus: Sangheili are (insane) from Mars_****

Chapter 4: Heroes

-

Eekyip blinked rapidly, his eyelids drooping until they almost closed. He'd been waiting for hours. He wondered if he was ever going to be allowed in. He slumped forward. A medic hurried past him, momentarily catching his attention. Of course, once Eekyip realized the preoccupied medic had no knowledge of his existence, he quickly lost interest. The hall was motionless once again, aside from Eekyip's stubborn, weary eyes.

Suddenly he heard voices from behind him. His eyes slid fully open. From behind the door he was leaning against, he could hear an even, low voice, a familiar sarcastic tone. He stood up a little too quickly and almost toppled over, but regained his balance just as the door slid open to reveal a _normal-sized _grunt in black armor. Eekyip was visibly disappointed.

The Grunt looked the rookie up and down.

"You must be the Eekyip," he said without emotion. Eekyip's heart pounded in his chest.

"Yes." He nodded urgently. "Is Mitmeer alright?"

The black-armored Grunt kept his eyes trained on the Minor.

"No I'm sorry, he didn't make it."

Eekyip's eyes widened in shock

"But he told me to tell you that he would always treasure your time together. All the trust and love that you shared-"

"Papat, you're an ASSHOLE!" came a gravelly voice from the nearby

medical room. Eekyip's face lit up. He ran past the snickering Spec Ops Trooper.

"Mitmeer!" Eekyip stopped when he saw his friend struggling to climb off of the examination table, two medics holding him down. He slapped the diminutive grunts away.

"-I'm alright, damnâ€¦|- Papat, I'm gonna ff- oh, kid listen, don't believe anything this guy says, he's a liar, **he's directly out of his goddamn**-"

"I will not stand hear and listen to you tarnish my good name!" Papat, the liar responded comically.

Mitmeer glared at him.

"Then leave!"

-

Rigreek stood patiently waiting for 'Mozomee's wave of dismissal. Waited and waited â€¦but it never came.

The sniper just kept talking and laughing with 'Ebamee. _Ignorant humans_ this, and _presumptuous fools_ that.

It was almost too much for Rigreek to bear. They _had_ won the battle, but it didn't change anything. If you were still alive, then you still had to fight. If you died, you didn't â€¦that was all.

He wondered if Mitmeer still had to fightâ€¦|

"Rigreek!" 'Mozomee barked.

"Sir?" Rigreek looked up expectantly.

"You're dismissed," he said without looking away from 'Ebamee.

Rigreek nodded respectfully. In a forced calm manner he stepped around the cone-shaped tent. As soon as he was out of sight, the Grunt sped up. He began walking faster and faster- so fast he nearly ran right into a Brute Honor Guard.

"HOLY â€¦"

Rigreek leapt back as the Brute's halberd sliced through the air. It roared and beat its chest with its free hand. Rigreek swiftly maneuvered around the less agile creature. He scurried through the camp, the Brute sluggishly trailing him.

-

"-so he's all sprawled out on a stretcher, blood everywhere, and he's screaming _put me back, I can still fight!_ Barely even moving, funniest thing you ever saw. And this is when I was still just a medic. And I'm sittin there tryin to dig the shrapnel out of his side, and his ass is flailing around yelling and screaming and cussin me out. So I tell him, _hey, you let me patch you up and we'll put you right back out there, big boy. Although I can't imagine why you'd

wanna go backâ€|_ And HE goes- _I'm gonna kill every single-â€|
dude, did you just call me _big boy?_"

Eekyip had just started to laugh when Rigreek stumbled through the door. The new arrival observed the entire scene and hesitated.

"â€|Mit. You're okay," he said in mild shock. He held his hand to the side of his head in a troubled gesture. "Gods I thought you were gonna bleed to deathâ€|"

"Yeah." Mitmeer replied coolly. "I'm fine Rigreek."

Rigreek stared at Mitmeer for a moment, and then looked at the ground.

"Good work, Pap," he said as he turned and exited the room.

After a brief silence, Papat began to speak quickly again.

"So then Mit cracks up laughing, like he was never even all fired up to begin with. I'm thinking, _what a psycho._ But at the same time I'm like, _this guy's alright._"

Mitmeer sighed.

"Nothing fazes you, does it Papat?"

"No, nothing.- So we started talking about this and that- I'm tryin to distract him from the chunks of metal I'm tearing out of his ribcage- he keeps asking me if I'm almost done. So I asked him again, why do you wanna go back so bad? And he says he was setting up turrets with his friend, when these humans came out of nowhere and opened fire. He's convinced that his friend is dead. He's goin on about how when he was promoted to gunnery this guy was the only person who welcomed him, made him feel important, the only friend he'd ever had. He says he swears that no matter how many humans he has to kill, he's not gonna stop until there are none left and there's no one left to fight. And no sooner had he made this promise then _another_ little green-armored Grunt get's wheeled in to my infirmary. And he's speechless. So I'm like, _HA! If he lives I'm totally gonna tell him every thing you said._"

Eekyip just grinned and looked at Mitmeer who was relaxing with a sheepish look on his face. Papat quietly exited as the battle worn pair broke in to laughter.

He closed the door behind him. Rigreek was leaning against the wall with his hand still to his head.

"Who's the kid?" Papat said elbowing the stiff trooper.

"An ambitious little twerp tryin to get in good with our squad leader," Rigreek responded promptly.

"Awww, what did he do to you?" Papat said knowingly.

Rigreek was suddenly angry.

"He punched me in the mouth!" he exclaimed.

"Big deal," Papat responded, waving him off. "Be thankful it wasn't Mitmeer who hit you." He pointed at Rigreek as though in warning.

"Why would Mitmeer have hit me?" he asked indignantly.

"To shut you up," Papat said with a good-humored grin.

--

With the butterfly birds roosting noisily in the nearby woods it was rather difficult to tune in on what one's superior was saying. That was as good an excuse as any.

Special Operations Officer Ellia 'Rozokumee stretched his jaws in a totally obvious show of disinterest. His yawn irritated the speaker, but Sub-Commander Sheeba 'Ra Fesamee' continued spitefully with his demonstration of some long and inherently boring procedure regarding the disabling of human security systems.

_Ha. Security... _Ellia silently scoffed. _What a joke._

He leaned to his right in an attempt to make a joke to Officer Omalo 'Bakajee regarding the Sub-Commander's _tight ass_, but Omalo had somehow managed to fall asleep in a perfectly legit looking upright stance.

Ack. Lucky bastard.

Not one to ruin a stroke of good luck, he turned his attention to Officer Bora 'Mozomee, sitting (if you could call it _sitting_) to his left and faintly behind him. It would be difficult to talk to Bora and still look alert. Fortunately for Ellia, he didn't care. The Sniper was cleaning his particle beam rifle in an unusual position. Ellia decided to, as the Sub-Commander would say, _optimize the situation_ by studying Bora's backside.

" 'Rozokumee!"

Guilty.

Ellia 'Rozokumee slowly turned to look at the Sub-Commander.

"Yes?" he responded compliantly. 'Fesamee _huffed_, but went back to his demonstration. Ellia's gaze immediately returned to the oblivious Sniper. The Sub-Commander spoke loudly as if to keep the bored Sangheili from nodding off.

He was a monster to Unggoy and Kigyar, but the Spec Ops Officers weren't intimidated by him in the least. Ellia grinned devilishly.

"Are you teasing me?" he murmured.

Hunched over, Bora glanced up at him. "Hm?" he replied.

" 'Rozokumee!" 'Fesamee snapped. The Officer winced. "Pay attention,

you damned pervert!" If the outburst had startled the sleeping Omalo 'Bakajee, he gave no sign of it. His eyes slowly slid open and he turned to look at the accused Sangheili.

"I apologize, sir. It was not my intention to make you jealous," Ellia said innocently. Behind him the brothers Zuris and Zakos snickered and Iko 'Ebamee shook his head, his hand concealing an involuntary grin.

"You're on notice!" 'Fesamee growled, and turned away from the tiresome officer. Ellia smiled. He went right back to Bora, now in an even stranger position.

"I said, are you teas-" he whispered, starting to repeat himself, and looked the Sniper over with some difficulty. "My... aren't you flexible?" he purred. Bora 'Mozomee's beam rifle hit the ground with a quiet thump and he looked up at Ellia with wide eyes. Ellia's eyelids dropped seductively. Bora retrieved his weapon and sat straight in his seat, eyes still wide open, trying to busy himself with what 'Fesamee was saying.

Ellia smirked. He turned around in his seat and laid eyes on the recently awakened Officer 'Bakajee. His smirk turned into a subdued grin as words and sentences began to jump and skip into place in his mind.

"Aw, O. I always manage to wake you up one way or another, don't I?" he said coolly. Omalo stared straight ahead and blinked twice.

"...don't know what you're talking about," he replied, disregarding the possible innuendo in Ellia's statement.

Ellia thought for a moment and snickered.

"Well I didn't mean it like that, but..." he waited for Omalo to say something.

"...don't know what you're talking about."

Ellia had to put even more effort into hiding his grin. He watched the impassive soldier, gauging his reaction to the ranting Sub-Commander...a difficult task with one such as Omalo, but Ellia could interpret the slight frown and fractional droop of the Officer's eyelids- annoyed.

"Sheeba's ass is SO tight..." he waited to see if Omalo would bite. After a moment the Officer still showed no change.

"How tight is it, Ellia?" he asked wearily. Ellia tried to remain calm.

"If you cut him open, we could stage an archaeological dig- I'll bet the forerunners left some important artifacts in his bowels." Omalo squinted. "...strategic value and all," Ellia finished quietly. Omalo seemed to process the theory for a moment, and then he bellowed a deep throaty laugh that sent shivers down Ellia's spine.

'Fesamee paused and turned around to glare. Omalo stared back at him seriously, and the tired Sub-Commander returned to his thoughts,

eager to get the whole meeting over with. Omalo allowed a satisfied smile to creep across his features.

"That was clever, 'Rozokumee."

Ellia shrugged.

--

After unwillingly spending the day in the infirmary, Papat insisted that Mitmeer move in to his _business tent _as he referred to it, on the outskirts of the elite camp, where Unggoy would be tolerated. There he had been sleeping for two days- with the help of some good pain-killers. Papat attributed his astounding recovery to _the Rookie's fantastic bedside manner_.

Mitmeer strapped on his methane tank and combat harness. Eekyip stood awkwardly next to the entrance, waiting for Mitmeer to acknowledge him.

"I'm almost done, Rookie. You can stop fidgetingâ€|" he mumbled.

Eekyip looked startled. He hadn't realized he was fidgeting, and wondered if he even was or if Mitmeer just didn't like him.

"Um, Mitmeer I, umâ€| I was just wondering if I could take some time offâ€|"

"â€|Go ask Rigreek then."

Eekyip looked at the Trooper in mild surprise.

"...we're not talking."

An irritated look crossed Mitmeer's face, but he continued assembling his armor.

"What the hell do you mean, _you're not talking_? He's your commanding officer; you're talking unless he says you're not talking..." He lifted his plasma pistol to examine it and found that it had been dropped. He glared at Eekyip suspiciously. The weapon would need a pointless diminutive adjustment before he could comfortably use it.

"Why is he my commanding officer- you're smarter than him-?"

Mitmeer sighed again. Without turning he replied.

"..._because he's in charge of rookies_...whether he does a good job of it or not isn't _actually_ any of my concern, he volunteered for it- _your his problem_. â€|and show some professionalism."

"Right, sorry. ...I haven't forgiven him. Niplip didn't deserve to die like that. He was a good person." Eekyip said resolutely. Mitmeer looked up from his gun. He waved his pistol at Eekyip as he spoke.

"Let me tell you something, kid. Your buddy wasn't special. A lot of the guys that die out here are _good people_. Otherwise, you wouldn't

hear about them, because no one would give a damn." He brushed past Eekyip out into the sunlight. Eekyip called after him through the tent flap.

"I'm sorry-"

"_Don't_...It doesn't bother me anyway."

The minor exited after Mitmeer. Before him Mitmeer stood in front of a rocky field, tweaking his sidearm further.

"...you must know a lot about weapons. Every time I see you, you're repairing one."

"Am I?" He twisted something within the pistol for a moment before he said anything else. "I used to be a weapons tech. ...me and Rigreek. We both got transferred here awhile ago...Rigreek fell in love with 'Ebamee, and-_I_-guess I have nothing better to do with my life..."

"...you could fix other things," Eekyip offered. "-Besides weapons, I mean." Mitmeer sighed, wiped his forehead with the back of his hand and looked up at the Minor.

"You're a pacifist, aren't you rookie?"

"...it's not that. I believe in fighting for a good cause-"

"But this cause doesn't interest you. Is that it? ...the forerunners' cause isn't good enough for you?" A barely noticeable smirk formed on the Spec Ops Trooper's lips.

"Oh come on, you're not serious are you??"

Mitmeer returned to his pistol, shaking his head.

"No, I'm just kidding with you Eekyip..."

Eekyip's eyes widened. Mitmeer saw the change in his peripheral vision.

"What?"

"...nothing that's just the first time you've said my name." Eekyip smiled.

"Uh-oh. I guess that means I'm getting used to you." Mitmeer stood up. "I'm gonna have to talk to 'Ebamee, see if he can't send you on a nice, dangerous mission- get you killed..." He held the weapon up to the sun briefly and examined it before quickly turning it away from the light. "-Send Rigreek with you, see if I can't get rid of you both with one..." he trailed off.

"You don't mean it..._do you_?"

"The part about Rigreek?" Mitmeer asked, his eyes twinkling.

"No, I know you mean that part. But, about me- do you really feel that way?"

"...Rookie. If you promise to shut the hell up, I promise not to feel that way. Deal?"

"Sure, of course! No problem."

"Shutup. Pick up those tethers, quick-like." He turned and started off through the boulder field. "Follow me. We need to cut through the camp."

"Okay-"

"Shutup."

Eekyip grabbed the unfamiliar items and followed quietly behind his _new _Commanding Officer. Mitmeer smirked.

"Heh...time off," he remarked. "Not around me."

-

The Brutes stood straight, impassive as warm-blooded statues, but a savageness lurked behind their eyes. Even the young minor could see through their focused gaze to the madness that threatened to mutilate whatever displeased them. Self control was the most important thing they would ever have to learn.

They had been sent to guard the _vital insight_ (property of the Prophets) until secure transport could be arranged. They were not to permit anyone to enter the tent, and when the time came, they would escort the data all the way back to _High Charity_ to present it to The Prophet of Truth. Even the highly decorated field master was denied entry for fear of _data corruption_.

Eekyip wondered what the data-crystal contained; human tactical data, desirable coordinates, or perhaps a glimpse at the wisdom of the Forerunners. That would certainly explain the paranoia associated with the crystal. Mitmeer recalled the prophets having spent the lives of tens of thousands of soldiers to recover a shred of theological evidence. They were desperate for these so-called _holy relics_.

"Keep moving, Rookie," Mitmeer said seriously.

"Where are we going?" Eekyip asked, scurrying after him.

"The other side of the camp." Mitmeer said over his shoulder.

"Why?"

"To do some real workâ€|"

-

Papat was spread out next to the creek that ran through the center of the camp- eyes closed, listening to the sound of running water. Totallyâ€|relaxedâ€|

"Who does he think he is? He's a MINOR, do you believe him, I was a minor something like- I don't even _remember_ when! He thinks he

can- "

"You KNOW- I was really happy until you walked upâ€¦" Papat tried to silence the intrusive Grunt. Rigreek looked at him for a second and kept talking.

"I mean, _what did I even DO?_ He's just mad because his little friend got killed. What was I supposed to do, take the bullet for him?"

"What- like Mitmeer would have done for either of us?" Papat mumbled. He folded his arms behind his head and closed his eyes again.

Rigreek kicked dirt in his face. Papat coughed.

"We've known Mitmeer forever, its different."

"So DO something about it, quit whining to me- god DAMN it, Rig!"

"Do something? What exactly-" he paused as a Jackal shoved past him, its companion snickering. He glared after the pair for a moment. Then slowly his eyes widened. He glanced at Papat- frowning, eyes closed on the bank- and followed after the jackal pair.

Papat opened one eye. He figured it was best if he didn't get involved in this mess, and tried to go to sleep.

-

Once the Sub-Commander, at the very end of his wits with the _undisciplined _Officers, concluded his demonstration, he warned Officer 'Rozokumee of the consequences of further disruptions, and was off to see to _more pressing matters._ Ellia 'Rozokumee grinned and leaned close to Omalo 'Bakajee.

"I'd like to press his matter," he muttered, casting Omalo a suggestive glance.

"...what does that even _mean?_" Omalo asked slowly. Ellia grinned.

"Oh, I think you know what it means."

"There really is something wrong with you," Omalo replied, giving him a disdainful look.

"I was only kidding," he said laughing. "'Sheeba's not my type at all. He's so..._rigid_..." The poorly behaved officer frowned. "He's like- Well, he's a tight-ass." Omalo gave his villainous laugh on a smaller scale. Ellia opened his mouth to let out some of the nonsense that was building up in his skull, but when he set eyes on Bora 'Mozomee he opted for a more reactive comment. "Speaking of tight asses...hey Bora."

The Sniper looked at him with the same wide eyes. His constant companion, Iko 'Ebamee, laughed heartily. Omalo shook his head and walked off. Ellia waved to him and sauntered up to 'Mozomee. He rested his Elbow on the taller Sangheili's shoulder.

"Bora you're so quick when you're shooting, won't you show me how to work your big gun?" Ellia hummed.

Bora gave him a friendly smile.

"Ellia, I'm sure you know how to use a beam rifle," he said softly.

"I have an idea..." Ellia admitted. "But the way you do it- you make it last so long. Show me, please!" Ellia beamed up at the taller Sangheili like a hopeful child.

"Absolutely!" he said, his pride blinding him. Ellia eyes held his gaze.

"Right now?" he asked.

"If you wish," the sniper said. "Iko, I will meet you this evening at communications."

Iko held up his hand to Bora and shot Ellia a knowing look. The devious officer grinned at Iko, Bora's heavy hand still at rest on his shoulder.

"Have fun," Iko said, smiling, trying not to laugh at a joke that the sniper was clearly not in on.

-

Eekyip was frozen in mild terror as the strangely pelican shaped cloud floated over the lilac sky. He made an uneasy grunt noise deep in his throat and shrank back away from the ever-threatening atmosphere.

"You are completely worthless, huh?"

Eekyip immediately responded to the cynical tone of Spec Ops Trooper Mitmeer -or_ Mitmeer, the sarcastic_, as Eekyip liked to call him (in his head of course) - and whirled around to face the largely more significant Grunt.

"Forgive me, Excellency," he said mockingly. "As of yet, I am without orders." Eekyip hoped the stoic Grunt could see the friendliness behind his own sarcasm -not half so much as how he wished he could see through Mitmeer's to what the trooper really thought of him. "Its enough to make a rookie wanna go back to Riggreek." He smiled fondly at the larger Grunt.

Mitmeer stood tall looking down at the idle Grunt. His face was nearly expressionless - aside from the look of mild contempt for the lazy rookie.

"Riggreek's dead."

Eekyip's eyes nearly fell out of their sockets. Mitmeer's expression remained still as he spoke.

"Just kidding."

Eekyip's eyes then shrank to half their normal size as he glared at the black-armored Grunt.

"Wha-? You're sick, Mitmeer," the smaller Grunt told him. A smile tugged at the corners of Mitmeer's mouth.

"You look disappointed." Mitmeer said matter-of-factly.

Eekyip frowned indignantly. He was about to deny the accusation when Mitmeer stifled a short, quiet laugh, and then giggled uncharacteristically. His hand flew over his mouth. Eekyip's eyes widened again. He was just about to complain about people always telling him that someone died, but he couldn't help grinning. Despite all the muscle, the quiet intensity, the even, displeased tone, Mitmeer's laugh revealed his true identity.

"So you are a Grunt after all," Eekyip said laughing.

"Shutup! I have a stupid laugh, alright?" Mitmeer's voice was squeaky from the laughter caged in his throat. Eekyip thought this was wonderfully funny, and then he thought for a moment.

"You don't laugh much, do you Mitmeer?" he asked in an almost sad tone. Mitmeer's smile shrank a little.

"What's there to laugh at?" he said simply. Eekyip grinned.

"What- you mean- besides me?" He stood up quickly and spun around in feigned indignation, took a step, and tripped over himself. Mitmeer's stifled laughter practically reverberated through his throat.

"You did that on purpose! Didn't you?!"

Lying on the ground and grinning, Eekyip asked, "Does it matter?" Mitmeer's shrill laugh rang out in triumph over his futile efforts at containment. Eekyip laughed and, seeing as how his neck was craned up at a ninety degree angle, he choked. Mitmeer gave him a look of mild concern and his giggling slowed. Eekyip snorted. The two Grunts stared at each other and simultaneously busted out laughing.

"Alright, alright!" Mitmeer said between breaths. "If you don't tell anyone about my dumb laugh, I won't tell them-" he inhaled deeply. "-that you're an idiot."

--

In the valley below, beside the Elite barracks, the Jackals stayed in pushy, bickering troops of three or more. Jagged, ominous looking red rocks loomed overhead, knocked loose from previous rock slides. The ground was covered in sanguine dust, and peppered with small hoof-prints.

A black-armored Grunt stood in a semicircle of disgruntled soldiers.

"So then he told me, you know, that Jackals are the weak link in the chain. He says, and this is crazy, I know, but he says you're the reason we're still fighting this war- he says if we had twice the Grunts and half the Jackals_, humans would be nothing but DNA on

slides right now."

The cruel, feathered creatures squawked and hissed at the accusation.

"I know, I know- it's bloody ridiculous. ...he's just a rookie; he's trying to impress me I guess. It's really kind of pathetic..."

The Jackal's cursed and raved in their harsh speech.

"Who is he?" hissed a tall, toned Jackal. He wore a black body suit and pewter-colored armor. The feathers on his wrists were long and thick.

"You're not going to do anything, er- against regulation are you, Major?" Rigreek said feigning a concerned tone. His eyes gleamed with malicious intent.

"I don't know what you're talking about," The Jackal's wicked mouth managed a deranged grin, his fierce fuchsia eyes in slits. The flock behind him cackled and snarled in pleased tones. The tall Jackal made a fist, cracking his knuckles with a crunch that made Rigreek wince involuntarily.

The other creatures cheered -Rog! Rog! Rog!- and snarled in their language.

In the back of his mind, Rigreek realized that he had done something terrible.

But he was used to the feeling, and brushed it aside.

--

Eekyip lay on his back pretending to look at the clouds. Every few seconds he stole a curious glance at the Spec Ops Trooper sitting next to him. Mitmeer was turned slightly away from him, hunched over with an energy rifle in his lap. He had exposed the battery, but from his angle Eekyip couldn't see anything else. Nor could he stare for very long with out attracting attention from Mitmeer.

He lingered on Mitmeer's eyes for a moment. They were the strangest color.

Mitmeer looked back at him.

"Sorry," said Eekyip, turning away. Mitmeer stared at him for a second and smiled.

"You can look at me, kid. Its no big thing," He said, holding back a laugh. Eekyip looked back at him with a small smile. Mitmeer returned his attention to the rifle he was adjusting.

"Well, it's TRICKY. I never know if you're gonna smile at me or give me a ****death glare****. Hmmmâ€¦ nice Mitmeer? Grumpy Mitmeerâ€¦"

In response to being called grumpy, Mitmeer promptly set his foot on Eekyip's ribcage and rolled him down the hill, where he crashed into a pile of scarp metal and salvaged equipment.

"OWww!" he complained from the bottom. Mitmeer smirked.

-

A streak of purple lightning clipped a branch clean off the top of a tall, lush tree.

More than 300 feet away, Bora 'Mozomee sighted through his scope

"Impressive," Ellia 'Rozokumee purred, "It must be absolutely overwhelming to be on the other end of that thing."

"I suppose so. It's normally lethal."

"_Most_ Impressive..."

"Here, you try," Bora said, and held the sniper rifle out to the effeminate Sangheili.

Ellia hesitated a moment. The way Bora clung to the rifle, he hadn't expected the sniper to hand it over so easily. Just as he laid his hand on its smooth purple surface, a shrill cry cut through the field.

"Officer 'Mozomee, sir- WAIT!" Rigreek screeched. He hobbled up to the two elites. Ellia cut his eye at the Grunt, looking displeased.

"Yes, what is the matter Rigreek?"

"'Mozomee, sir! In my foolishness characteristic of an Unggoy, I had forgotten to mention to you a dent in your rifle."

"A _dent_ you say?" Bora repeated in shock. Ellia glared.

"Yes sir. A sizeable indentation- could very well inhibit your performance, sir. Must see to it immediately." Rigreek plucked the beam rifle from Ellia's hands. The Officer growled. "Excuse me," Rigreek said, and was off.

"Take care of it, Rigreek!" Bora called after him like an apprehensive mother. Ellia huffed impatiently. "Ellia, I'm sorry. I will have to show you my skill another day," Bora said with a shy grin. "It was my error- if the state of my weapon had not gone unbeknownst to me-

"It's no problem at all, Bora," Ellia said returning the smile. "Surely we can find something _else_ to do." With his hand on the Sniper's back, Ellia guided him on.

"Of course! â€|what did you have in mind?" Bora asked. Ellia's hand slid lower.

"Maybe I'll show you _my_ skill."

:

As soon as Rigreek was out of site of his superior, he hurled the

beam rifle to the ground. He delivered a sharp kick to the side of the weapon.

"Yep! Look at that _nasty_ dent."

-

Mitmeer stared at the dismantled particle beam rifle in front of him. He sat cross-legged on the ground with the various parts laid out on a sheet before him. He reached out and poked a dull purple sphere. It glowed fuchsia and was dark again. He picked up a tiny crystal tube and held it up to his face, squinting. There he found a small crack running down the middle of it.

"... Shit."

He replaced the tube on the sheet, taking a moment to assess the damage.

"Eekyip!"

The yellow-armored Grunt looked up from a human grenade he had been thoroughly examining. He came scurrying up the hill to his adopted CO.

"Yes sir!" he said enthusiastically, the grenade still in his hand. Mitmeer calmly reached out and plucked the explosive from the Minor's hand and placed it on the sheet with his _assignment_.

"I need you to go down and get me some parts from Nailay. Tell him it's for Officer 'Mozomee."

"Sure."

"Hurry up."

"Yes sir!"

Eekyip sped off almost running into Rigreek as he went. The Trooper gave him a false smile and continued up the hill to Mitmeer's position.

"Is it bad?" Rigreek asked pleasantly. Mitmeer cast him a mild glare.

"In the future, please don't attempt to repair 'Mozomee's weapon," Mitmeer said simply, his tone packed with unspoken threats, "Ever." Rigreek grinned and started off to harass other hard-working Grunts.

"If it keeps you busy..." he said softly, his back to the focused Trooper. But Mitmeer perked up at the hint of conspiracy in Rigreek's voice. He watched the trouble-maker slink away.

-

Iko 'Ebamee stood commandingly outside the center for upper ranks communications- a sort of half way point between the spec op barracks and _east camp_, which Sub-commander 'Ra Fesamee' was wholly fixated on. The high security _east camp _was the site of the shifty field

master's quarters as well as a small enclosed area patrolled by a pair of brute guards. Iko surmised that the sub-commander, mistaking himself for someone of importance, was lurking around the camp site waiting for some official to throw him a bone. He had also scolded himself for thinking so insolently.

For a moment he abandoned his authoritative stance to stretch to his full height and peer over the smaller tents, scanning the camp for his partner. He was confused as to where Bora could be and then he remembered who was accompanying the sniper.

'Ebamee recovered his proud posture. He sighed gently.

"This could be awhile"

--

Eekyip scurried to and fro, tripping over sharp red pebbles, balancing a stack of parts in his arms and staggering unsteadily. He sighed and took a careful step forward only to trip over the upturned root of a small tree. Just as he was mentally preparing to recover the soon-to-be-dropped materials, force was applied to the other side of his pile. He rocked back onto his feet and stabilized.

"Thanks," he said lowering the stack to come face to face with a grinning Jackal. He recoiled and dropped the stack reflexively.

As he bent to retrieve the items, a boot came to a rest inches from his nose. He looked up at the vicious bird like creature, its fuchsia eyes radiating malevolence. It sneered at him.

"Poor little gas sucker..." the Jackal gurgled. "It's not your fault you're so weak and clumsy, is it?" He picked up a chunk of metal and tossed it to his companion. The smaller Jackal hissed in amusement.

"Maybe you should let us hold this for you, gruntling." Eekyip started to protest when the Jackal continued, "Then again, maybe your kind is better suited for this type of work. Us Kigyar will always be better at intellectual matters." The Jackal Major circled the small Grunt.

>"We're far more tactical than you thick-skulled gas suckers." He stepped on a glass part, crushing it into crystalline dust. "Aren't we?"<p>

Eekyip glared at the tall, smug Jackal.

"Why don't you put all that tact to good use then? I don't see any Spec Ops Kigyar," he said conversationally.

The Jackal's grin disappeared and he hissed at the Minor. He plucked his plasma pistol from his belt and tossed it aside. Eekyip's eyes widened as he suddenly remembered how small he was. He glanced around nervously.

The Brute guards stood still before their tent, one of them unable to restrain a monstrous yawn. The very sight of its wicked teeth made Eekyip's stomach shrink to half its normal size. Those beasts would not help him.

The smaller Jackal came behind Eekyip and relieved him of his side arm as well.

"Hey!" Eekyip protested. He turned his attention back to the large Jackal just in time to see Rog throw a punch.

The larger soldier's fist struck him in the left side of the head. The punch sent Eekyip spinning and he hit the ground in a blur of dust.

:

Hectir watched the Grunt and Jackal with the detached curiosity of a child watching a colony of ants. He grunted and shook his head in a sharp, wild manner.

"The Jackals are acting strangely," he said- half to himself. Barsarus, his partner, turned his head to appraise the situation, but otherwise remained motionless.

"They are strange," he said looking straight ahead again.

Hectir watched the head-Jackal push the lone Grunt to the ground, and gave a quiet growling chuckle. A crooked white fang protruded from his bottom jaw, giving him an untamed appearance. He smirked, no longer bored.

:

Rog's crest of feathers flared like a fire escaping from his skull. He jerked Eekyip up by his breast-plate and tossed him over the dirt. Eekyip rolled twice before a rock broke his momentum. He scrambled on all fours before Rog grabbed hold of his leg and repeated the action. Blue cuts and purple bruises formed on his limbs and he tried to get up again, but Rog delivered a swift kick to his chest, the creature's boot clanging off of his armor. Eekyip wrapped around himself trying to smother the metal-to-metal reverberating. He gasped urgently, unable to breathe for a moment. He forgot about the pain in his chest when the Jackal's foot made contact with his mouth-piece. Methane-enriched blood pooled in his mouth followed by pain so intense he couldn't pinpoint the actual injury. Neon blue dripped down his chin and he sputtered. He wheezed as he was brought up by a set of wicked spindly fingers closed around his throat.

-

"Where's Eekyip?" Mitmeer asked the idle Spec Ops Trooper in front of him suspiciously. Rigreek looked up at him, his eyelids drooping in a dazed, carefree expression.

"Who?"

The aggravated Grunt heaved an exasperated sigh and walked on. The resting Trooper smirked.

Mitmeer wore the expression of a worried mother, scanning the camp for yellow armor.

"Has anyone seen the rookie?" he said to a group of Spec Ops Grunts

who shook their heads in reply and went back to their conversation.

He sighed again in the same fashion. A pair of Jackals shoved past him. He growled low at them as they ran off hissing and screeching excitedly to each other. Mitmeer stared at them for a moment, and then decided to follow them. He had a bad feeling about this...

-

The tall Jackal lifted Eekyip by the throat and slammed him against a tree-trunk. The Brute guards looked on with savage interest.

"We'll see who the weak link is, won't we Unggoy?" he cackled. The bird-like creature lined up his crimson wreathed fist with the Grunts jaw, pulled it back- and was suddenly jerked ferociously backwards. Eekyip looked up through dizzy eyes.

"Mitmeer," he cheered weakly.

The warrior Grunt flexed his claws, and snarled, glaring daggers at the large Jackal.

"I guess you guys think you're pretty damn braveâ€|" Mitmeer said in a low voice.

The other Jackals screeched wildly, but Rog backed away from the intimidating Spec Ops Trooper. The crowd shoved him forward, though, so he rushed at the black-armored Grunt with all his courage. Mitmeer caught the Jackal around the neck and closed his other hand around his opponents delicate shoulder- turned his hand, and yanked the arm from it's socket- squeezed once, and crushed the bone. Rog screamed and raked his claws down Mitmeer's face. The Grunt didn't even flinch. As twin electric-blue streaks became obvious upon his cheek, Mitmeer closed his hand tighter around the Jackal's small throat. He crouched and lowered the creature to the ground. Feeling his air supply being cut off, the head-Jackal made a desperate swipe at Mitmeer's throat, but in a fluid motion, the Grunt raised his heavy foot and brought it down hard on the Rog's hand. With a final squeeze, he collapsed the creature's throat and released his grip. Rog crumpled to the ground in a lifeless heap.

Enraged, the other Jackals charged forward, relying on strength in numbers to safeguard them from the Grunt's strength. Mitmeer caught one of them by its crest. He delivered a hard blow to the back of its neck and the small, light bones snapped. Another buried its claws in his side. Mitmeer elbowed the attacker in the jaw, the bony spike on his arm protruding through the other side of its face. The next clamped down on his wrist with its needle-like teeth, and sank its claws in to his stomach. He thrust his knee it in its throat, the spike located there becoming lodged in the Jackal's mouth. He pushed the gagging thing away with his free hand and pulled his leg back- the spike, like a hook, tore its bottom jaw away. A small Jackal got behind him and leapt onto his back trying to disassemble the breathing apparatus. A panicked expression flickered across the Grunt's features, and was gone. As he armed a ghostly plasma grenade with practiced ease, Mitmeer struck an advancing Jackal under the chin and it flew backward. Reaching over his shoulder, he carefully dropped the grenade. It adhered to the back of the last Jackal's

neck. The creature screeched in shock and loosened its grip on Mitmeer. The Grunt pivoted sharply throwing the creature. He took a hurried step back and brought up his arm to shield his face from the blue-white explosion.

Mitmeer staggered once from the heat of the explosion, and inhaled deeply, but otherwise seemed perfectly composed. He walked silently over to Eekyip and extended a purple-stained hand, which the pained Grunt eagerly accepted. The Brute guards smirked callously and turned away. On the one hand, five Jackals were dead. On the other, it had been a good fight.

The single surviving Jackal Minor lay on the ground, his neck sprained. He squinted painfully.

"Courage doesn't win battles," Mitmeer said calmly. "...discipline does."

Eekyip wondered at the black-armored Grunt before him. As Mitmeer bent to support Eekyip's crippled frame, the minor remembered their hurried introduction months ago.

"...Rigreek was right about you," he said in an almost revering tone.

"Ugh, don't say that." Mitmeer frowned adjusting to Eekyip's height. "Rigreek isn't right about anything." He smiled. Eekyip smiled back, despite his pain. He walked with a severe limp. Mitmeer surveyed him. "Between that pansy armor and the way you handle yourself, no one's ever going to believe you're Spec Ops," the Trooper said with a small, comforting laugh.

"Thanks." Eekyip chuckled. "I feel _loads_ better now." Mitmeer smiled.

--

Papat's eyes darted from slash to bruise.

"DAAAMN kid. What did you do?" Papat asked incredulously before swabbing a clear harmless looking liquid onto one of Eekyip's open wounds.

"OooOOW!" Eekyip wailed, though as soon as he'd felt the intense stinging sensation, it was over.

"Jeez they really did a number on youâ€¦ Don't let Rigreek get to you, kid. He's justâ€¦ I dunno, insecure or something." Papat said without thinking.

"Yeeeahâ€¦ Wait why do you say that?" Eekyip asked, genuinely puzzled. Having a foot-in-mouth moment, Papat froze.

"Hm?"

"What does Rigreek have to do with any-"

"Oh, nothing. Just in general. Don't let him get to you. He says a lot of stuff he doesn't mean, talks before he thinks you know." He began to rummage through a box of medical equipment. "Those weapons

techs- not the smartest fellas in the Covenant. â€|well, smart about guns. But not people-

Eekyip completely tuned him out.

â€|_wait. Weapons tech?_

He remembered Mitmeer-

I used to be a weapons techâ€| me and Rigreek-

"Rigreekâ€|"

The grunt that he was so worried about, his **best friend**.

Eekyip couldn't believe it. â€|how could he not have known that they were so close? â€|probably because Mitmeer never showed it. Still, he felt like a fool, complaining about Rigreek all the time, with Mitmeer just nodding patiently.

Oh man, how embarrassingâ€|

"â€|Pa-â€|hey Pap," Eekyip warily sought the Trooper's attention.

"Mmyeah Eek?" Papat said easily. Eekyip smiled at the nickname. Remembering his question, he put his smile away.

"Did you ever tell Rigreek what Mitmeer said?"

Papat stared at him for a moment as if _almost _confused.

"About him? â€|back when we first met," he said certainly.

"Yeah. About him being the best friend he ever-

"No."

Eekyip was silent, just stared. Papat stared back.

"I never got around to it. Huh." He blinked. "How silly of meâ€|" Papat said, and suddenly turned back to his box. Eekyip processed this information.

"Maybe Rigreek _is_ insecure. He must really care about Mitmeer," Eekyip said, glancing up at Papat as he realized he was talking out loud. "But he doesn't know Mitmeer cares about him."

"Hmm," Papat vocalized his response, not clearly in agreement or disagreement.

"So he resents me."

"You're smarter than you look kid," Papat said, and jabbed a syringe under Eekyip's collarbone.

:

Ellia 'Rozokumee leaned casually and observed the two Sangheili

before him. He inspected his hand in a nonchalant manner.

"It was some sort of _animal_," said Bora 'Mozomee, reluctantly displaying a row of scratches on his midsection. Iko 'Ebamee scrutinized the marks and glanced at Ellia.

"Indeed," said Iko.

Ellia smiled sweetly.

:

Mitmeer stood at a distance taking deep breaths. He unconsciously fidgeted with 'Mozomee's repaired particle beam rifle.

"'Ebamee sir," he practiced. "Out of respect for you- I thought you should know- no. Out of respect for you sir, I am compelled to inform you-"

Mitmeer watched 'Ebamee make a sly hand gesture at 'Rozokumee, who laughed out loud.

"â€|that I WRECKED half a squad of jackals- nope."

He sighed, and walked to 'Ebamee, his head bowed respectfully. When he reached the seemingly juvenile officers, 'Ebamee greeted him with an amused smile. Sometimes Mitmeer despised the Squad Leader who chose the worst times to treat him like a pet.

"Officer 'Ebamee Sir â€|" They nodded to one another. Mitmeer paused. He then walked past the towering Elite, trying to play off his falter as simply addressing his superior. "Officer 'Mozomee. You're rifle, sir." 'Mozomee received the weapon with wide eyes and a growing smile, all supposedly animal-related injuries forgotten.

Without hesitation, Mitmeer swiftly excused himself.

He'll find out.

-

Confident that his day had gone exactly as planned, Rigreek relaxed inconspicuously. He toyed with a bit of scrap metal that someone somewhere needed desperatelyâ€| He recoiled when a sharp edge cut a thin blue line on his palm.

"OW, mother-!" he began to overreact, stopping when he heard a rhythm of heavy footfalls not nearly far enough behind him. Rigreek cast a look over his shoulder and scrambled onto his feet in record time. He threw the lump of metal behind as a fruitless decoy. The massive Brute Guard stomped after the black-armored Grunt, bellowing its vicious enthusiasm. Rigreek ran for his life, again.

-

I hope this clears up the swarm of indiscernible black-armored Elites. It might be tough 'cause I've got the Elites calling each other by their first names, and the grunts calling them by their last names. But you get used to it.)

So- that's chapter 4. What do you think? Eek and Mit are gettin pretty chummy. Look out Iko!

5. Monsters

_Thank you to all my fantastic reviewers! _

_Especially my partner in GruntxElite crime, Misfit Minion.

_

Eekyip: Yaaay!

_Yes, without herâ€|this probably still wouldn't be done. Haha.

_

Now- chapter 5- BAM! Let's get it on! *points at Grunts* -not like that.

Rigreek, Papat, others: Awww.

Horny Gruntsâ€|bad thing? You decide.

â€|_lol_

Sorry.

-â€|- A brief disclaimer: _I apologize if this is so gay it makes you wanna go out and buy a sequin blouse. Actually I don't- that's how I roll. BWA-HA-HA. So you go out and buy that blouse and you ROCK THAT SHIT and you do it for Mitmeer._

Mitmeer: ...gee thanks.

This has been a brief (not really) disclaimer from **J. Bittersweet**. -â€|-

* * *

><p>Unggoy are from Venus: Sangheili are (insane) from Mars_

Chapter 5: Monsters

Eekyip was curled up in a shady trench between two grassy hills. The unkind wind roared overhead, but the hills were impassable. The noise drifted gently down to the sleeping Grunt's ears and he paid it no heed. He stirred in his sleep, curling into the soft moss beneath him.

He was being chased by a pack of Brutesâ€| They howled and slobbered like animals, despite being clad in full body armorâ€|

However, the dream ended abruptly as the Minor was awakened by the cycling chirp of approaching Phantoms.

He sat upright. It was early- so early the planet's binding white sun was just coming up. The landscape was only softly lit, painted in a surreal ivory dawn. He felt as if he was still dreaming.

â€|Until Mitmeer yanked him up by his combat harness. The larger Grunt patted his back in a nonchalant sort of apology. Eekyip wobbled on his tiny feet and Mitmeer put a hand on his shoulder to stabilize him. The abrupt transition from lying down to standing made him slightly nauseous, but he shook it off.

"What are you teaching me today, Mitmeer?" Eekyip asked, rubbing his eyes. Mitmeer faced him.

"Nothing," he answered. "Unless you don't already know how to sit in a Phantom for an hour."

>"What's happening?" Eekyip asked groggily.<p>

"We've just been reassigned," Mitmeer said in a fairly even tone. Eekyip sensed something else there. "-a _real_ Spec Ops mission." The rookie couldn't tell if Mitmeer was excited or nervous.

"Where to, boss?" he said through a yawn- a fairly impressive one given his size. Mitmeer didn't notice.

"Don't know yet." The Spec Ops trooper looked as though he wanted to say more, but didn't.

"You seem like you have mixed feelings about this," Eekyip said, concerned. Mitmeer glanced to the right hesitantly and looked back to the yellow armored Grunt.

"Well it's just thatâ€|" Mitmeer tugged on the minor's harness and gestured for him to follow. Eekyip crowded him as if he were waiting to hear a secret. They made their way to the flock of sluggishly descending Phantoms. "I'd love to get off this planet. It'sâ€|mind-numbing to me. But â€"" Mitmeer hesitated.

"Are you scared?" Eekyip whispered. Mitmeer gave him a strange look, as though it were completely unheard of for a Grunt to be scared. Then his look softened.

"No," he said. "â€|not very."

"What's the matter then?" the Minor asked, growing more concerned. Then Mitmeer looked right at him. Eekyip realized, he still wasn't wearing his eye protectors. The Spec Ops Grunt's eyes were a deep, smoky green, the same dark color as Eekyip's abandoned moss bed. But they seemed different in the dawn light, as though they now held more emotion when Mitmeer looked at him. He momentarily forgot his worries. Mitmeer broke eye contact with him, glancing right.

"Nothing," he said in his own tone of voice once more. He began scaling the second Phantom's entrance ramp. "I just didn't expect us to be leaving so soon." He stole a glance over his shoulder. "I'm not sure we're all ready," he muttered.

-

Officer 'Ebamee took a meditative breath. Sitting with eyes closed, he began to mentally prepare himself for their next assignment. Suddenly there was a block in his serene train of thought. He glanced at his partner, Bora 'Mozomee.

"Did you happen to see the Unggoy board?" 'Ebamee asked. A dazed look flickered across 'Mozomee's face, as he realized the question was directed at him.

"No. Why?"

'Ebamee closed his eyes, leaning back against the cold metal interior once more, and didn't answer. 'Mozomee shrugged, and took an interest in his particle beam rifle.

-

Mitmeer sat with his long legs spread. His spiky elbows rested atop his comparably spiky knees. He leisurely rolled his head from side to side, cracking his neck. Eekyip watched him vaguely aware of a conversation between the Spec Ops Grunts, Mimiek and Nailay. He'd never seen Mitmeer so relaxed- not even when he was injured and bedridden.

"HI guys!"

Mitmeer's eyes snapped open. Eekyip looked over his shoulder as Papat strolled into the hold. Nailay eyed him fearfully.

"You're still alive," Mitmeer said coolly. "Didn't 'Fesamee take you on a little walk yesterday?"

"HA-ha yeahâ€¦ and you know what? There were snipers posted on the east ridge. Teenting and Gobopo took a round each in the chest. Dropped em," Papat told him.

"Yeah? And what about, uh what'sis nameâ€¦|mojito?"

"Kikita. That poor fuzzy bastard. He had a beam rifle and the humans got away. So 'Fesamee rang a flight patrol to get the humans. And then he snatched up Kikita's beam rifle and then he bashed his head with itâ€¦| it was intense," Papat said, his eyes wide. Eekyip swallowed hard and the two senior Grunts took notice. "That's how it is, kid. There are only two Grunts who've ever gone out with Sub-Commander temper-tantrum and come back alive. That would be yours truly, and-"

"Rigreek," Eekyip finished.

"That's right," Papat said in slight surprise. Mitmeer blinked tiredly.

"Where is Rigreek?" he said. Papat shrugged.

"Who knows?" the former medic responded. "Last time I saw himâ€¦| well, he was preoccupied."

-

In the cargo hold of _the Riveting Hunt_, compressed between a crate packed with Spiker Pistols and a massive grenade launcher, Rigreek cursed. In his hurry to escape a furious Brute, he'd boarded a Brute piloted drop ship. Besides the passengers smelling about as pleasant as a Phantom full of rotten meat, Rigreek wasn't positive that _this_ ship would eventually reunite him with his squad. Suddenly nauseous,

he stuck his head between his knees and tried not to imagine how the Brutes would react when they found him.

-

Mitmeer eyed his friend suspiciously.

"What exactly do you mean by that?" he asked. Papat didn't look at him.

"SO the elites sure took off in a hurry. Must be something important, huhâ€|" Papat said casually. Mitmeer let the question of Rigreek float to the back of his mind.

"They probably waited until the last minute like they always do," Mitmeer reasoned.

"You'd think they'd wanna, you know, prepare or something while we're wasting away on this backwater planet, sniffing our fingers all day," Papat muttered, eliciting a strange look from the rookie.

"Their weakness is their pride," said Mitmeer, relaxing into his previous position. "They think they've thought of everything."

A silence fell over the passenger bay. Everyone seemed peaceful but Papat. The field medic glanced from one Grunt to another waiting for someone to speak. After several minutes passed, he decided to take matters into his own hands.

"This one time, at medic camp-"

"NO." said Mitmeer and Nailay at once. Papat's mouth hung open. He turned to Eekyip, an ill-behaved look in his eye.

"I'll tell you later," he said, pointing at the rookie. Eekyip giggled. "Well, I've got another one."

"Nothing about _medic camp_, Pap," said Mitmeer sternly. Papat turned to look at him.

"Who made you the boss of everything?" he asked, the same look in his eyes. Eekyip couldn't help smiling.

"The same person who made me bigger than you," Mitmeer said ominously, opening one eye to look at Papat. Eekyip laughed. Papat seemed satisfied with that answer and continued with his story.

"So, we were surveying a star system-"

"Surveying?" Eekyip repeated. Papat held up a clawed finger comically.

"Don't interrupt," he told Eekyip. "So we were you know, doin our thing, and our tech starts to pick up this umâ€|" he paused, searching for the word. Mitmeer's expression became more annoyed the longer Papat thought. "What's it calledâ€|Anal-?"

"ANOMALY, goddamn it-" Mitmeer exploded.

"Right, exactly." Papat grinned. Eekyip didn't even try to conceal a

fit of giggling. Mimiek, the second youngest Grunt laughed too. "So we get dropped on this asteroid," Papat continued. " Just Mitmeer, Rigreek, THIS guy who was drunk the whole time-" he gestured at Nailay. Mimiek looked amused as he gauged the larger troopers reaction to Papat's accusation. Nailay's mouth fell open.

"I- you guys gave that to me, I didn't even- I didn't-" he tried to explain. A light-hearted chuckle came from Mitmeer, of all people.

"Ah, good times," the largest Trooper said.

-

Rigreek snored lightly as he slept, curled up in the cargo hold. His leg twitched and he snorted as the ship came to an abrupt stop and then another abrupt stop.

"Damn Brutes can't pilot a drop ship to save their hairy-"

Just then, the floor beneath him took on a fuchsia glow.

"Aw, shh-" The box Rigreek was sitting on seemed to melt into, or rather, through the floor of the drop ship. His extremities tingled as he was pulled down on top of the metallic box. He passed through the layer of neon mist, squinting as he was assaulted by a blinding-white decontamination pressure wave. The light retreated and his eyes grew accustomed to the near empty docking bay of a BTR Carrier.

"Yyyess." Rigreek glanced around the docking bay. The Brute passengers were snarling at some Jackals. Two of the Jackals and a Brute separated from the group and made their way towards Rigreek's box. "No!" He quickly leapt off and tried to distance himself from them. When the Brute spotted him, grunting irritably, Rigreek rushed forward again.

"Heeyy," the closest Jackal hissed as Rigreek grabbed onto the corner he was about to reach for.

"Lemme get that for you," he said smoothly.

He waved the upstaged Jackals to the opposite side. The two Jackals struggled with their end, while Rigreek (being of a physically stronger race) lifted his end easily. Rigreek casually walked the oversized box backwards, while the Jackals, facing forward, sneered behind their end of the object.

"So," the Grunt prodded. "Where's my buddy Rog?" Rigreek looked over the box with a friendly grin. Two pairs of magenta eyes popped into his view, staring at him in disbelief. The eyes shared a look and two feathery crests nodded in agreement. Without a word, the weaker Jackals combined their strength and lifted the crate as high as they could. Rigreek was caught completely off guard. His knees buckled and the container came crashing down on top of him.

The pair watched in satisfaction as the Grunt struggled out from under their box. Rigreek shoved the container off of his lower body and stood.

"What the hell was _that_ for?" he shouted. The two Jackals flexed their claws.

"That's him," another Jackal screeched, distracting Rigreek from his current predicament. He turned to see a short dark-skinned Jackal scout, pointing at him accusingly.

"Awgo!" Rigreek's excitement died away as he realized the state his Jackal acquaintance was in. Rigreek frowned. "What the hell happened to your neck?"

-

After setting foot aboard the carrier, the Spec Ops Grunts walked in a loose formation. Eekyip followed behind them, his head jerking one way and then the other. He'd never been aboard such a spacious ship. He slowed his pace when a particularly large doorway came into view.

"So, Mit. You gonna help me with my luggage?" Papat asked with a grin.

"In a minute," Mitmeer told him.

"No, seriously," Papat said skeptically.

"I'll carry it all for you if your skinny ass can't handle it, but first I gotta take care of the rookie."

"What rookie?" Papat asked him with an amused grin. Mitmeer turned to find that his shadow had disappeared without a trace. He stared at the spot where Eekyip should have been.

"Well, shit..."

-

Officer 'Ebamee and his squad were quick to meet up with the Sub-commander and the rest of their unit. They made their way to the communication chamber reserved for the Spec Ops Commanders. Iko 'Ebamee was trying to warn his squad that the Sub-commander was not in a wonderful mood, but the Sangheili were in good spirits and brushed 'Ebamee off.

"Sheeba can roar all he wants, Iko," Ellia 'Rozokumee remarked.

"Iko, even if he is as irritated as you say," Bora 'Mozomee said, grinning at his friend. "Surely- _you_ will protect us from him." The warriors laughed cheerfully. 'Ebamee sighed.

They would have to find out the hard way.

-

Twenty Special Operative Sangheili were gathered in a large, dimly lit room. Sub-commander 'Ra Fesamee' spoke confidently as the others stood at attention. Also present in the room were the hologram representations of Commander Xar 'Modomee and Commander Rtas 'Vadumee. At some point, the Sub Commander took the lead in their

discussion, a bold move before to Sangheili who outranked him.

"We will dispatch a ground team and deal with this-" the scrambled voice of Rtas 'Vadumee interrupted the Sub-commander's rant.

"It cannot be done," 'Vadumee said resolutely.

"With Fuel-rod cannons. A close formation of Phantoms and Banshee fliers- better yet, bombers- could destroy all of the creatures from a distance." The Sub-commander's tone was becoming fiercer.

"We are unwilling to risk the capture of any space-faring transports. If even one made its way back to the carrier-"

"Then I will take my troops in," the Sub-commander announced. "We will fight them hand to hand if we must. Simply because you are not willing-"

"Enough," the most experienced of the three, Commander Xar 'Modomee, interjected "This effrontery will stop. Do you really mean to say that you are more capable of this task than Commander 'Vadumee? Can you tell me, Sub-commander," he emphasized Fesamee's rank harshly. "Who is the most widely recognized in sword combat within the entire Covenant?" he asked. The Sub-commander's bravado began to recede.

"Spec Ops Commander 'Vadumee," he growled out.

"Which Spec Ops Unit has seen the most commendations for close quarter combat?"

"Commander 'Vadumee's unit, Excellency," he answered in a much lower voice, deferring to 'Modomee. 'Vadumee looked on, hands behind his back in an authoritative stance.

"You have answered correctly," said 'Modomee. "That is comforting. But in the future, you must not shame yourself so in front of those who follow you. It is unsuitable for one of your rank."

Sub-commander 'Ra Fesamee' was ashamed. His bitterness toward Rtas 'Vadumee had tainted his words.

"We will contact you with your orders, Sub-commander," 'Modomee dismissed him. "See that your troops are well equipped." The Sangheili's image flickered and shrunk into nothing. 'Vadumee's lingered.

"May the prophets bless your endeavors, Commander," Fesamee said by way of an apology. He gave 'Vadumee the Elite sign of respect.

"May you're kills be many, Sub-commander." The second hologram too shrunk away.

By the wisdom of Iko 'Ebamee, all six members of second squad were safely outside in the corridor when Sheeba 'Ra Fesamee' began screaming.

Nonchalantly examining his claws, Rigreek leaned against the amethyst interior of the carrier. His conversation with Rog's right-hand Jackal, Awgo, had not gone entirely as planned.

Five dead Jackals... What a mess. Not that he really cared...

A blue light flashed to his left a second before the Hunter-sized door slid open.

"Since when do you get all rough and tumble over some rookie?" he asked the black-armored Grunt who attempted to pass by him. Stopping, Mitmeer cut his eye at his fellow.

"Do what?" he said flatly.

Rigreek glanced up from his semi-interesting left hand.

"Awgo. From 'Nacmee's squad." Rigreek tilted his head. "He says some crazy-ass Spec Ops Grunt killed Rog and four of his subordinates..._and_ the bastard apparently sprained Awgo's neck," he finished in a transparently empathetic tone.

"And you think I fit the description," Mitmeer said calmly.

"Perfectly." Rigreek smirked. "What happened to your face?"

Mitmeer involuntarily touched the claw marks on his left cheek. _Damn_, he thought, half-heartedly.

"Since when do you have friendly conversations with deadbeat jackal underlings?-"

"Since when do you kick the shit out of them in broad day light?" Rigreek shot back with eyes narrowed. Mitmeer's expression was unchanged.

"The Rookie was doing me a favor. Maybe I was a little offended by their disregard for that."

"Well did he tell you _why_ Rog jumped him? Maybe your big-mouthed rookie had it coming." Rigreek smiled.

"You _were_ behind it," Mitmeer said just above a whisper. Rigreek gave an unconcerned shrug.

"Why do you put up with him?" Rigreek asked, intrigued.

"...he's a smart kid, I can rely on him." Mitmeer said simply.

"Doesn't look that way to me," Rigreek remarked.

"I don't give a DAMN how it looks to you," Mitmeer replied, his voice rising as his temper flared.

"What about 'Fesamee?" Rigreek asked boldly. "Do you care what _he_ thinks?"

Mitmeer's brow furrowed- he gave the other commando an uncertain

look.

"Fesamee doesn't pay any attention to Grunts," he spat. Rigreek took a few steps closer to the larger Grunt.

"Don't you wish you knew that for sure?" he said smirking. "Yellow is a bright color," he hummed "-and hard to miss..." and passed through the corridor, leaving the warrior to his thoughts.

Now Mitmeer was starting to sweat. The Sub-commander was very much inclined to be an asshole. If he noticed Eekyip, he'd have him transferred in the blink of an eye. â€|he wouldn't last long on the front lines with the rest of the cannon fodder Grunt Minors.

-

White and lilac pillars of light illuminated this sector of theBTR-class carrier, _Tranquil Aftermath_. Eekyip walked slowly with his neck craned up. He imagined if everyone on deck stood on each other's shoulder's they might be able to reach the ceiling of the gigantic room.

He jumped nearly as high when Mitmeer barked at him.

"Rookie!"

Eekyip felt the commando's hand close around the back of his neck.

"Yes," Eekyip responded as Mitmeer dangled him above the deck.

"**Quit wandering off. **I don't have time to give you a tour, so you watch me and go where I go. Got it?"

"Alright," Eekyip said compliantly. Mitmeer gave him a little shake. The minor just swung lifelessly.

"What are you doing?"

Eekyip was confused.

"Huh?"

"You're supposed to squirm," Mitmeer said, his eyes narrowing impatiently. Eekyip tried to look over his shoulder at Mitmeer, but the larger Grunt shook him again. "Rookie- if an Elite grabs you up, you squirm," he said. Eekyip could tell he was agitated. "See if you struggle, they think you're uncomfortable. If you're not uncomfortable, they assume they're being too gentleâ€|" Mitmeer gave Eekyip's neck a forceful squeeze. The rookie kicked his legs futilely and pawed at Mitmeer's closed hand.

Mitmeer felt pretty terrible. He hadn't had this problem when he taught Mimiek the same lesson months ago. He hated to hurt Eekyip. Mitmeer gently lowered the small Grunt's feet to the floor and released him.

"Good, Eekyip."

"Ow," said the rookie, but he smiled when Mitmeer called him by name.

"Don't say ow unless you get shot," Mitmeer said. His speech and posture gave Eekyip the impression that he was grumpy, but he knew better than to comment.

"Sorry, sirâ€|"

"Don't call me SIR," Mitmeer reprimanded him.

Eekyip groaned.

"I can't do anything right," he mumbled.

Now Mitmeer was starting to regret being so short with him. He realized he was just treating Eekyip the way he treated everyone else. But somehow it felt wrong. His conflicting feelings tore at him. His principals told him to treat his equals with cool detachment, be apathetic and sometimes abrupt. But although Eekyip was his equal (at least as far as any Grunt was concerned), he was naïve and inexperienced. He was nothing like the seasoned Spec Ops Grunts, or even the glum frontline Grunt Majors and Minors that Mitmeer interacted with. Just as he had before- while Eekyip trailed behind Mitmeer hanging his head- Mitmeer found patience as he spoke.

"Don't whineâ€| remember the gorge? You covered me with the turret."

Eekyip was reluctant.

"Yeah, but you got hurt," he said. Mitmeer looked at him in mock disbelief.

"Uh, _yeah_ and I probably should've died."

"â€|so why did you do it?" Eekyip peered around Mitmeer's large shoulder's to see his face, eagerly awaiting the bigger Grunt's answer. But Mitmeer said nothing. He just looked straight ahead. A disappointed look crossed Eekyip's face. They walked quietly for a moment.

"I wanted to see if I could trust you," Mitmeer said.

Eekyip looked up at him, surprised for a moment, and then smiled.

--

Rigreek had been hovering around the Sub-commander for the greater part of the day, waiting for the opportunity to shift the Elite's attention momentarily away from the transport of his precious Fuel Rod Cannons and portable double-mounted semi-powered Plasma turrets. Sub-commander Sheeba 'Ra Fesamee' smiled down upon the weapons like a proud father...until one of the labor Unggoy tripped and an unloaded Fuel Rod hit the deck with a metallic thud, slid, and came to a screeching halt at the Sub-commander's feet. The Elite's smile melted

into a scowl.

"Idiot..." Rigreek said under his breath, but felt a pang of pity for his fellow.

The lowly Grunt trembled, inches from the dropped weapon, but too terrified to move any closer to the sour faced Elite. Fesamee' cupped his bottom jaw in his hand in a disbelieving gesture.

"What happened?" he asked in a disappointed tone. The Grunt remained on his knees, shaking.

"I- I apologize...pro-PROFOUNDLY, Ec-excellecy..." he stammered. Fesamee' seemed satisfied with this for a moment. He brought up his massive foot and tipped the Fuel Rod to examine its dense-coated side. With a nod, he acknowledged a small dent in the forward seal. He snatched his plasma rifle from Rigreek and brought it down over the groveling Unggoy's head with an awful crack. Rigreek winced. Tiny droplets of blue blood splattered the deck.

"I trust it won't happen again," said Fesamee', his composure regained, as he wiped the blood from his rifle conservatively. The Grunt slowly rose. Fesamee' eyed him as he struggled to heft the huge gun, taking dizzy steps forward and back. Fesamee' scowled. "Return to your line! GET THAT WEAPON WHERE IT IS GOING, BECAUSE I DON'T WANT TO SEE IT AGAIN UNTIL IT'S NEEDED! -And I don't _ever_ want to see _you_ again!" the Sub-commander bellowed. The Grunt scrambled off after the other members of his transport unit.

Rigreek looked away anxiously. The unpleasant Sub-commander was not his biggest fan, nor would he take kindly to being manipulated. But his concerns were shoved aside as he caught sight of the yellow-armored Grunt and his Spec Ops escort.

"Sub-commander 'Ra Fesamee'," Rigreek's voice crackled as he addressed the Elite. Fesamee' looked down on him with an irritated expression.

"What is it?" he said impatiently.

"Esteemed Sub-commander, I wondered if you had noticed the Minor who's been following us lately-" The Sub-commander brushed past him, taking deliberate strides toward the Grunt Minor.

Rigreek went back to his actual designated task, snickering to himself.

-

"What you need is a camo-generator. You're not an infiltrator without one." Mitmeer said.

"Me? An _infiltrator_? That sounds important, I don't knowâ€¦"

"That's what Spec Ops is all about. These goofy bastards get in because they can carry a fuel rod gun, and do it quiet-like," Mitmeer said, making his little companion giggle. Mitmeer _almost_ smiled.

He led his partner through sub-deck B, a distracted look on his face. Eekyip followed him closely, until a giant Elite foot pounded the floor between himself and the Spec Ops Grunt. Mitmeer whirled around, his expression a grim sort of shock. The Elite was just another nameless, faceless black-clad enigma to Eekyip- but this one carried itself with a special sort of arrogance, and his armor bore two silver glyphs of the forerunners.

"Sub-commander," Eekyip addressed the glaring Elite.

"And you are?" The Sub-commander snapped. Eekyip hesitated. He looked to Mitmeer who nodded urgently.

"I'm Eekyip, sir."

The Sub-commander's frown deepened.

"Is that_ all_?" he rumbled. Mitmeer's posture suffered from the Elite's question. Eekyip's hopes fell.

"Minor," he said trying not to sound disappointed. "Sir," he added.

"And who are you to address me in such a familiar manner?" the Elite reprimanded him fiercely. Eekyip visibly shrunk.

"I-I apologize, Excellency- I'm no one in particular," he admitted. His submission seemed to please the Elite.

"Good," The Sub-commander smiled cruelly. "You _seem _to know your place well enough...which leads me to believe that this is _your_ doing," he said turning on Mitmeer. The Spec Ops Trooper snapped to attention.

"Yes, sir I've been letting Eekyip shadow me since our operation on the human outpost."

"Shadow you?" 'Fesamee repeated. "I hadn't realized you were running an internship for the **Special Ops**."

"Not at all, Sir," The Spec Ops Grunt replied. "When we met, he merely wanted to observe a Spec Ops Unggoy. He specifically told me that he wanted to learn from the branch that knew what they were doing," said Mitmeer, twisting Eekyip's words a bit. The Elite's features softened further at hearing this.

Eekyip smiled. Mitmeer had said that pride was the weakness of the Elites.

"That is admirable. I approve of such ambition. But that does not justify your actions." The Sub-commander's stern expression returned. "He is unfit to be in this unit," he snapped. Mitmeer took offense to this- his normally unconcerned eyes heated to acid-green.

"He's **not unfit**, sir, by any means," he said bravely, standing rigid as though to challenge the sturdy-looking Sub-commander (and Eekyip entertained the possibility that Mitmeer could take him). "He's resourceful, quick on his feet, he follows orders, and he's a **damn good shot**." Despite his external determination, Mitmeer was starting to think he was fighting a losing battle. He was also

anticipating a potentially humiliating and/or painful reprimand.

"Indeed," came a commanding voice.

Eekyip fought back the urge to whirl around and face the Elite. He calmly glanced over his shoulder. Iko 'Ebamee stood over him, radiating confidence.

"I bear witness to his skill, Sub-commander. He is an excellent shot." Iko informed the scowling Elite. "He has several confirmed kills- remarkable considering the injuries he sustained on the human secondary base." Iko looked fearless, despite his exaggerations. The Sub-commander did not look convinced.

"Why did he not report to his commanding officer subsequent to the battle," he asked. Eekyip noticed the anxious look on Mitmeer's face and kept his guard up.

"Because the battle was one in which the odds were quite unfavorable to our cause, Sub-commander. Subsequently, his commanding officer, having killed many humans, was at peace in a pool of their combined blood."

"You're apparent talent for story telling neither distracts nor amuses me, Squad-leader."

"He is the last surviving member of his unit, to make clear my point. He would do well to honor his former commanding officer by doing something useful." Iko paused to evaluate the Sub-commander's disposition. "He belongs here as much as anywhere."

"No! He belongs in a regular unit, not here- not with the Special Operatives."

"Sub-commander," Iko reasoned. "This Unggoy came to my aid in a perilous situation. He eliminated an immediate threat to my life. ...I will take him into my unit- we could use another gunner, and I would not overlook his talents," he said in a manner that signaled the end of the discussion. 'Fesamee seemed to fall under Iko's spell as he lost interest in the matter.

"Very well, 'Ebamee. This is highly unusual. However, I grow tired of your banter. You will take the actions necessary to add him to second squad; you take full responsibility for him- his successes, his failures- indefinitely." Iko nodded respectfully. "May he meet a more honorable end than your last Unggoy pet," the Sub-commander said as he returned to his weapons.

Eekyip watched Mitmeer bristle at the Elite's cryptic remark. 'Ebamee held up his hand to the fuming Grunt.

"Peace, Mitmeer. The Sub-commander is cruel to strike at a fresh wound such as yours." 'Ebamee looked compassionately upon him. "Don't let him get to you. You've done nothing wrong," Mitmeer turned his head away from the Elite. "You will take care of our new friend, won't you?" he asked, watching the Grunt with mild concern. Mitmeer hesitated a moment, trying to subdue his anger. He set eyes on Eekyip. The smaller Grunt looked utterly confused and concerned for him. Mitmeer's expression softened.

"Yes, 'Ebamee," he replied. Smiling despite himself, 'Ebamee left the two Grunts. Mitmeer glanced around, as though trying to get his bearings. "Tech/suppliesâ€|," he said, his eyes settling on the neon indicator. C'mon, Eekyip." Mitmeer grabbed the minor by his wrist. He led him away from scene of their brief conflict with the fearsome Sub-commander.

"Wh- why are we going thereâ€|Mitmeer?" Eekyip stammered. Mitmeer turned to give him a quizzical look. The minor's arm was outstretched from being partially dragged by his mentor. He had a peculiar look on his face. Mitmeer began to pull him onward, but stopped, stunned by the realization that he wasn't holding Eekyip's wrist at all. He was holding his tiny hand- quite tenderly.

"Uhh," was Mitmeer's rather inarticulate response. He immediately released the Minor, lest he become the laughing stock of the Spec Ops community. "Camo-gen, remember?" he asked, not looking at the yellow-armored Grunt.

"Oh. Yeahâ€|" Eekyip said. He rubbed his hand on his cheek cutely. Mitmeer turned around and looked over his shoulder to see Eekyip staring up at him.

"Don't wander off again," Mitmeer mumbled. He began walking toward their destination. Eekyip quickly caught up to him. He stared at the ground for awhile as the two walked in silence, until he couldn't keep quiet any longer.

"Mitmeerâ€|what was the Sub-commander talking about?" he asked. "When he made you so upsetâ€|" Eekyip craned his neck, trying to watch Mitmeer as they walked. A strained look crossed the larger Grunt's face, like the words were painful to form. The smaller Grunt watched, studying Mitmeer's expression. He inhaled deeply, as though he were about to dive into water. But before he could take the plunge, he felt Eekyip's little fingers wrap around the more narrow part of his hand. Mitmeer held his breath when he met his friend's gaze. "It must be something really bad, huhâ€| You don't have to tell me right now. You can tell me some other time." He smiled sweetly and let go of the bigger Grunt's hand. A puff of methane pushed past Mitmeer's breathing filters as he finally exhaled, eliciting a small laugh from Eekyip. Mitmeer nodded.

"I will."

-

Mitmeer led Eekyip to the center of technology and supplies on sub-deck C to have his stealth generator installed. The service drone revealed that it would be awhile before Eekyip could apply to have his armor changed, but he received the stealth mechanism smoothly. Upon leaving the area, Mitmeer spotted a certain conniving trooper pushing a cart of food supplies for the Elites.

"Rigreek," he called after him in a serious tone. "Come and congratulate Eekyip, he's just been transferred to a new unit."

Rigreek's face was wickedly satisfied as he eyed the still yellow-armored Grunt, but the look was slowly replaced by one of mild

dread as he read into Mitmeer's choice of words.

"**Which**__unit?" he asked suspiciously. Mitmeer couldn't help but smile.

"Ours." Rigreek's face was priceless. He babbled something unintelligible and watched as Mitmeer strolled past him. "Come on down to the commons with us to tell everybody the good news." Rigreek put on an apologetic face.

"Can't. Got work to do." He hung onto his food cart like a life-preserver. Mitmeer waved at some nearby Jackals.

"Hey fellas," he said loudly. "You wanna take care of this for my friend here? To SPEC OPS." He kicked the cart out from under Rigreek, causing the shorter Grunt to stumble. The Jackals snarled as the cart rolled down the corridor towards them. "Please," Mitmeer growled, bearing his teeth. The Jackals complied, grunting to one another in their language.

"How generous of you," Rigreek said flatly. "I forgot you were the scourge of the Kigyar."

"Yeah, it has it's perks. I guess I should thank you," Mitmeer replied.

"No need to thank me," Rigreek said in a modest tone. "After all, it was never my intention to make you a hero."

"Yeah. I know what your _intention_ wasâ€¦|funny how things work out, huh?" said Mitmeer. Eekyip walked behind the two Spec Ops Grunts, listening and looking confused.

"How DOES a Minor on his first mission become a Spec Ops Trooper over night?" asked Rigreek. His temper was rising along with Mitmeer's, but Rigreek did a much better job of hiding it.

"It was _all_ 'Ebamee's doing," Mitmeer said with a grin. "You know how he just loves, Eekyip."

"Sure," Rigreek returned the see-through grin. "_Ebamee_ does," he looked suggestively at Mitmeer. "Whatever you say, Mit."

"Are you guys fighting because of me?" Eekyip interjected. The two Grunts looked back at him.

"NO," they said simultaneously.

"We're just talking Eekyip," said Mitmeer.

"Yeah, rookie," said Rigreek. "about stuff you wouldn't understand."

"I understand that you lied to those Jackals to get them to beat me up," said Eekyip. The older Grunts stole a glance at each other. Before either could say anything, Eekyip spoke again. "I'm not mad though. Papat told me not to take you seriously." Rigreek's mouth fell open. "You two must think I'm really stupid," Eekyip said quietly. "But I'm not." He locked eyes with Mitmeer, who looked ashamed and faced forward again.

The three Grunts walked on in silence; Mitmeer out of guilt, Rigreek out of indignation, and Eekyip had simply said everything that needed to be said.

--

When they had finished their awkward journey to the bowels of the carrier, it was Eekyip who remembered to stop and help Papat secure his things. They found him just outside the Unggoy sleeping quarters.

"Man," Mitmeer remarked. "Corner office, huh Papat?"

"Daaaaaamn," Rigreek said as he walked into the former medic's spacious room.

"RIGREEK," Papat exclaimed. "Are you taking your vitamins?" he asked Rigreek. "Everyone! Stay away from Rig, I think he caught something from that Brute," he said, unconsciously slapping a capsule in Eekyip's open hand.

"Ew," Eekyip said as he swallowed the anti-biotic.

"That's right. No lovin for Rigreek for awhile."

Mitmeer fished through a drawer, throwing things around the room with abandon. Papat eyed him.

"Hey, make yourself at home," he said sarcastically. Mitmeer made a frustrated noise.

"WHERE did ALL this shit come from?" he asked.

"I resupplied!" Papat showed him an accomplished grin. At long last, Mitmeer surfaced with a cylindrical metal object. Papat gave him a look of disdain. "That's what you wanted? A capacitor?"

"Yep," Mitmeer replied. "You two can go on ahead. We'll meet you at the commons." He knelt to place the recently acquired stealth apparatus on Eekyip's armor.

"Uh huh," Papat mumbled, taking a reluctant Rigreek by the arm. "Like I said, make yourself at home." His suggestive laugh was cut short when the door slid shut between them.

Eekyip held completely still, watching Mitmeer install his new camo generator. The larger Grunt occasionally glanced up at Eekyip as he worked. Finally he spoke.

"I'm sorry about earlier," he told the yellow-armored Spec Ops trooper. "I didn't mean to make you feelâ€¦" Eekyip shook his head, throwing Mitmeer off a centimeter or two.

"I'm not mad at you. All you do is take care of me and watch out for me," he said gratefully. "If you wanna take advantage of me sometime than that's totally okay." Mitmeer's brain involuntarily misinterpreted Eekyip's words and his eyes widened. He looked Eekyip in the eyes while moving the capacitor, at which point a surge of electricity shot up his arm, paralyzing him for a few seconds.

Eekyip's eyes widened in concern, but to no avail. He immediately disappeared from sight as the stealth system was engaged.

Blushing blue-violet, Mitmeer wished he could disappear too.

-

The lower cafeteria was filled to the brim with all manner of obnoxious creatures. However, no voice rose over Papat's as he interrogated his friend.

"You mean to tell me that Fesamee just _let_ your Squad-leader make a minor into a Spec Ops trooper." Papat looked skeptically at Rigreek as the conniving Grunt slurped his meal.

"I don't know, I didn't stick around to find outâ€|" he replied. Papat did not seem satisfied. Until he caught sight of the two people he knew could provide him with an answer.

"Mitmeer," he called.

"What," the approaching Grunt responded. Papat repeated his question.

"He just, said '_ok_'?"

"Mhm," Mitmeer confirmed Papat's suspicion. "He said something along the lines of-" Mitmeer made his voice as deep as he could. "_Rarw, enough 'Ebamee I tire of your endless convincing! Leave me alone and let me make love to my fuel rod cannons! WORT, WORT, wort_." Papat and even Rigreek exploded into laughter.

Eekyip struggled to focus on what Mitmeer was saying, as a group of three huge insectoid-workers flew past the table across from them and down the long corridor.

"Damnit," Mitmeer said suddenly. Eekyip tried to listen, but the words were lost on him "I forgot â€| need to find â€|see â€|be right back." â€"and he was gone. And Eekyip was on his feet, walking at first, and then scurrying to catch up with the speedy insects with wings like pulverized jewels.

After wandering the halls, and peering into more than a few occupied rooms, Eekyip at last happened upon a room _full_ of the creatures; Yanme'e. He entered quietly, making his way to the top of a deep pit where they buzzed. Eekyip had never seen a Drone before, but he knew them when he saw them. As they fluttered about a miniature hive, Eekyip leaned on the railing that offered some security to flightless creatures and watched. After some time, many of them watched back with their luminous compound eyes. The Drones were vibrant and multihued and they possessed an energetic grace- and Eekyip thought Niplip would have liked to see them.

He was glad. Being with Mitmeer, Papat, the Grunts in 'Ebamee's squad- even Rigreek, made him feel content. Like an empty place in his dreary life had been filled. He still missed his friend. But he knew Niplip, and nothing bothered Niplip. Somehow Eekyip felt like, even in death Niplip could have found a "bright side". He smiled absently. As he politely exited the Drone room, it didn't occur to him that he was going the wrong way.

-

"Whoo," Mitmeer sighed as he took his seat next to Rigreek and "no one. "Where's Eekyip?" he said in an exhausted tone. After a hurried slurp of his food, Rigreek answered snidely.

"He left. -Went that way." Rigreek gave him a brief transparent smile. Mitmeer grinned back and then returned to his aggravated expression, rolling his eyes. He stood, sighing loudly and left in the indicated direction. He didn't know if he could trust Rigreek where Eekyip was concerned, but his was the only lead he had.

-

The hazy lavender glow of the overhead lights made Eekyip dizzy so he stared at the floor a few feet in front of him. He was starting to wonder how far he was from his friends. He longed for Mitmeer's reassuring presence, Papat's stories, or Rigreek's snide remarks. He vowed never to stray from Mitmeer's side again.

Eekyip walked at a lazy pace. He was jolted from his thoughts when an armored shin collided with his face. He dropped to the ground clutching his mouth. His mask shuddered from the impact and he pawed at his nose to smother the effect.

Sitting flat on his bottom, his legs straight out in front of him, he craned his necks up to meet the impassive gaze of an Elite Major.

"Well" what a helpless little thing," he said in a softly sinister tone.

Eekyip was frozen solid. He tried to speak, but his voice refused to cooperate. His response came in a combination of words and soundless exhalations.

""apologies"mistake"didn't see"Excellency." Eekyip babbled. Before he could articulate an entire sentence, the Elite lifted him by his chest plate. Already too small for the armor, Eekyip started to slide down. When the plate hit his chin, the Elite squashed him against the wall.

He grunted. The Major grinned and reached out to touch the Grunt's exposed ribs. Eekyip shivered as the Elite's long, wicked fingers grazed his skin. The monster chuckled menacingly. Eekyip clenched his teeth.

This feels...

The naïve Grunt knew right away, his situation wasn't normal Elite unpleasantness. It was...

...wrong.

The Elite's touch, his voice, his laugh all made Eekyip's skin crawl. His instincts were screaming for him to get as far away as possible, but even if he was in good health, he doubted he could outrun the scarlet monster. "Excellency," Eekyip tried to remain calm. "Is there "some service I can perform-?"

"_Service_..." the Elite repeated slowly, as if savoring the word. "Yes, I suppose you could call it that." Again, he chuckled diabolically.

A feeling of dread came over Eekyip. His expression was anxious. He was confused and tired-and terrified. The Elite leaned closer until his red armor clacked against Eekyip's. He could have counted the teeth in the monstrous mouth, if he hadn't turned his head in weak protest. Eyes closed, he whimpered and pressed back against the wall in an attempt to escape the situation. He could feel the monster's breath on his neck. He shivered and opened his eyes just in time to see Iko 'Ebamee turn the corner.

:

Special Operations Officer Iko 'Ebamee took one look at the Elite Major and felt suddenly murderous. He noted the muscles in his arm tightening as he reached instinctively for his energy rifle. Restraining himself, he strode forward and bellowed in his deepest, most commanding voice,

" 'Eetumee!"

:

Officer 'Ebamee's gold eyes glowed with hatred for the scarlet Elite as he strode toward them. The major distanced himself from Eekyip, but did not release him. Several emotions splashed over the Grunt's senses- fear, embarrassment, fear, RELIEF, fear, anticipation, confusion, terror, fear-

" 'Eetumee," Iko snarled. "Have you some quarrel with my assistant?" ... Eekyip almost laughed. There were no _quarrels_ between Elites and Grunts. There were disputes - yes - occasionally, but they usually resulted in a dead body or two (Grunt bodies, of course). The existence of laughter was shaken from his mind as _'Eetumee_ not-so-gently deposited him on the ground.

:

"Yes," the major lied, cloudy black eyes crowded by his large malevolent grin. "As a matter of fact, _Officer 'Ebamee_, " he said disdainfully. "I do. Your grunt obviously collided with me just now, and said nothing." Iko's eyes narrowed dangerously. "When I addressed him, he nonchalantly explained that he hadn't seen me. Am I really supposed to accept that?"

The black-armored Elite scrutinized the major's form.

"Indeed it seems highly unlikely. How anyone could miss your...- _flamboyant_ ornamentation -is _beyond_ me." 'Eetumee frowned at this. Iko saw that his armor had been coated with a special varnish to eliminate daily cleaning. Iko thought for a moment that he could have been looking at the Elite in infra-red. He turned to the paralyzed Unggoy. "Is this _true, Eekyip?"_ 'Eetumee's gaze too fell on the Grunt.

:

Looking up from his position on the ground, it seemed to Eekyip that he was in the middle of a battle between two giants. The red giant was malevolent and terribly confusing. The black giant may have been defending him, but he was nearly as confusing as the first.

Eekyip forced himself not to meet the gaze of the red-armored Elite. He was too terrified to quiver. He just sat there, weak and frozen in fear, but Iko's firm voice worked miracles.

"Is it true?"

"...No, Excellency," he said softly.

Iko's expression softened fractionally. 'Eetumee's was unchanged. He smirked at Iko as if Eekyip had not spoken, but the Spec Ops Elite glared back at him as if insisting that he had.

"You'll take his word over _mine_, then?" the major said dangerously.

"I had only to hear your word to know that you were _lying_." With one large step, Iko put himself between 'Eetumee and the Unggoy. "But he has spoken. Ironical, is it not? This little Unggoy is not half the coward that you are, 'Eetumee. You should embrace your nature. And flee," Iko growled.

The scarlet Elite frowned at the thought of being dismissed, but complied silently. His heavy feet fell eerily silent on the metal grating as he walked away. Iko glared after the officer until he was out of sight. When he returned his gaze to Eekyip, he found the stressed and injured Unggoy had fainted.

-

Mitmeer turned the corner sharply, his moss-colored eyes darting this way and that scanning the ship's many corridors. If he knew Eekyip, the place would be like a fuchsia labyrinth to the minor. Mitmeer searched for the unlikely yellow upon constant purple. He frowned. He wasn't particularly fond of purple- or yellow for that matter.

He whipped around another corner, totally oblivious to the near silent footfalls of Major Vera 'Eetumee and almost colliding with the Elite. Mitmeer involuntarily jumped back, quickly noting 'Eetumee's posture and expression. He vaguely resembled an animal that had been chased away from its kill by a larger predator.

But as the presence of potential prey registered, 'Eetumee's face lit up in a gruesome sort of way. Before he could make a move, Mitmeer addressed him smartly.

"Excellency," Mitmeer bowed his head respectfully. "Have you-" He hesitated for a split second. "Seen an Unggoy Minor on this de-"

"You mean 'Ebamee's grunt?"

Mitmeer's eyes widened.

Oh no.

"I have_ seen_ him." He grinned cruelly.

His tone was inexplicably repulsive. Though outwardly unfazed, Mitmeer wanted to attack the Major. Of course, the odds were clearly against him. And Mitmeer wouldn't give 'Eetumee the excuse to lay a creepy finger on him.

"I'm afraid I couldn't tell you where he is now," he purred eerily.

The Grunt held back a shudder. The Major chuckled. His words were unsettling, but Mitmeer was very good at reading people. 'Eetumee _had_ seen Eekyip, and he _had_ been chased off by a bigger predator: 'Ebamee.

Mitmeer pressed himself against the wall as 'Eetumee passed, avoiding his dangling arms as though they were the stinging tentacles of a jellyfish.

He surmised that Eekyip would be tired and afraid, and that this would greatly affect the suddenly soft-hearted Officer 'Ebamee. Eekyip was probably somewhere in the Elite barracks. He would be safe with 'Ebamee... but for some reason, Mitmeer was still worried.

He cast a look over his shoulder and locked eyes with the red-armored Elite before he disappeared behind the sliding door. He shivered, and then he glared.

"Fuckin' whack-job..."

-

Eekyip came to, feeling a warm closed in sensation and every sip of methane he took in laced with the scent of Iko 'Ebamee. His eyes shot open.

"Oh no, where am I?" he squealed. He heard a quiet chuckle from the corner of the room.

"You're in my bedroom." 'Ebamee said simply. Eekyip laid eyes on him. The officer was diligently cleaning his jet black armor, meanwhile clad in nothing but his skin tight vacuum suit.

"Eep!"

'Ebamee laughed louder. He sat down on the edge of his cot. It was currently occupied by the Grunt, but his tiny body took up less than a quarter of the space. 'Ebamee could sit comfortably as he polished his imposing helmet.

Eekyip glanced around the room. His eyes settled on the neat stack of armor in the center. It looked flawless. His eyes flashed back to 'Ebamee and having come up with nothing to say cleverer than 'uuummmm', he continued to observe his surroundings. 'Ebamee's rifle hung neatly beside what Eekyip recognized as the hilt of his energy sword. The floor was cold and metallic like the rest of the ship, but he doubted that bothered the Elite. If 'Ebamee's thick soles could absorb the shock of a fall from an airborne phantom, he probably wasn't subject to the chill.

Eekyip was jolted back into paranoia when an argument broke out on the other side of the closed door. He heard two raised voices, two growling Elites, and something shattered as it hit the wall next to him. Eekyip jumped. 'Ebamee simply looked up quietly from his helmet, his expression half annoyed and half defensive. Soon an even louder voice was heard; that of a superior. Eekyip could have sworn it was the Sub-commander. No one else could sound so angry. Seeing the smile on 'Ebamee's face, as he went back to work on his somehow imperfect helmet, only served to confirm the Minor's suspicions.

In someway, Eekyip credited 'Ebamee with calming the situation, and so felt slightly more comfortable with him â€|in his private quarters â€|with most of his own armor missing!

"Eep!" He exclaimed. 'Ebamee just smiled.

"It's on the floor next to you," he said softly. Eekyip peered as far as he could over the edge of the cot, seemingly made for a giant. His armor was indeed in a tidy pile on the ground. 'Ebamee finally pulled his helmet over his head and stood up. Eekyip averted his eyes as the Elite reassembled his shining armor and strapped it on to his body. Feeling very nervous he decided to make conversation.

"Excellencyâ€| No way should you have had to carry me all the way-"

"Do you mean to say that I am not strong enough to support a single Unggoy?" the Elite said, his eyes sparkling mischievously. Eekyip's eyes widened.

"No! NO! I- I justâ€|" he stopped mid sentence and shivered violently. 'Ebamee halted in his process and bent over to retrieve a blanket that had been kicked from the cot at some point. In two great strides he was next to Eekyip, carefully draping the blanket over the Unggoy's shoulders. Eekyip continued to shake. "I wish I wasn't so helpless. I wish I wasn't a Gruntâ€|" he said, not really meaning it. 'Ebamee kept his large hands on the Grunt's shoulders.

"We are what we are," he said soothingly.

"Well than what makes you so different from the other Elites, like Sub-Commander 'Ra Fesamee' or that Major-" he stopped realizing how out of line he was. But 'Ebamee just smiled and leaned closer in to him.

"When you are kind your own soul is nourished, but you destroy yourself when you are cruel. â€|some of us have yet to realize that."

"Butâ€|" Eekyip tried to understand the words. He was so tired. "Is that why you stepped in andâ€|"

"You saved my life," 'Ebamee said as he stood to his full height once more. "I owed you as much." At this, Eekyip felt slightly more awake.

"Officer 'Ebamee?" he said rather urgently. The Elite looked down at him. "What did he want? What was he going to do me?" he asked ever so innocently. 'Ebamee sighed and touched the Grunt's chin reassuringly.

"Something you don't deserveâ€¦ Go back to sleep," he said, and gently pushed Eekyip onto his back.

Eekyip rolled on to his side, blinking his eyes shut. With one large hand 'Ebamee pushed covers in place around him. The Grunt stretched adorably and snuggled into the Squad Leader's bed. 'Ebamee watched the covers rise and fall with his breathing for a moment, before taking up his energy sword and slipping out the door.

-

The iridescent lighting of the repair station cast a shimmering glow on a battalion of gravity intended vehicles. A Phantom hovering in the center of the giant room sported a deep gash along its length. Over and over again, the luminescence swept over it like a solar flare. Metallic blues and purples were smothered under the pale glow. On a platform adjacent to the damaged phantom, a company of tittering engineers pulled parts from a vertical shelf.

Behind the shelf sat Mitmeer. Due to his hindering size, his legs hung precariously over the edge of the platform. Dangling from thirty feet up didn't seem to bother him. Light and shadow danced over his body contrasting his still expression and fatigued posture. With out the shrill questioning of the Grunt Minor, he was left to his thoughts for the first time in days. It felt foreign to him.

Now that the problem of Eekyip being transferred was permanently taken care of, he was back to his original worry. How could the largely untrained Minor survive a full scale Special Op mission? Mitmeer had fooled himself thinking he could train Eekyip before their next summoning into a suicidal effort. But with the translation of orders dripping slowly down through the chain of command, Mitmeer had expected he'd have a lot more time. Also, the terrain of the quasar-lit world where they had become acquainted was much better suited for non-regulation combat training than the crowded carrier stuffed with shrieking Engineers and regulation-crazy Elites.

Grunts learned from experience. The longer you survived the higher your rank would be. Against the things Mitmeer was used to, Eekyip wouldn't stand a chance.

-

The glossy maroon and violet bulkhead was dull in the darkness of the training hall. In the dimly lit room, two energy swords cast their phantom glow. Iko 'Ebamee slashed downward and struck Bora 'Mozomee to the floor. Breathing heavily the sniper sat for a moment as Iko closed in on him.

"How does the Unggoy fare?" Bora yelled. Iko lowered his sword.

"What Unggoy?" he said calmly. Bora stood.

"Zakos and Zuris say they saw you carrying that yellow Unggoy back to your quarters."

"Oh. That Unggoy," he said, turning the blade over. Bora swiftly grabbed an energy hatchet from the weapon shelf and rushed at Iko. He

grunted, chopping at him with all his strength. Iko caught the axe head between the prongs of his blade and turned his wrist sharply. The axe hit the floor with a _whiz_. Iko gave his blade an expert twirl, his massive foot on top of the hatchet. It deactivated harmlessly and Iko kicked the hilt away.

Bora, anticipating Iko's advance, ducked under his blade and clasped both of the taller Sangheili's wrists. He forced the skilled swordsman backward. Iko's back clacked against the arched wall of the training room. Bora focused his strength on Iko's sword, squeezing his wrist hard. But Iko had suffered that indignity before and would not let the physically stronger officer get the best of him. He took advantage of Bora's disinterest in his left hand.

Iko grabbed the sniper by his forearm, twisted the arm over his head and carefully angled his sword away from Bora's chest. He pulled his opponents arm back over his own shoulder as far as it would go, so that Bora's back was against his chest. He quickly brought his blade under the other Sangheili's throat. In that position Bora's right hand was useless, but his left held Iko's blade at a reasonable distance from his neck.

"So," Bora said, his voice strained. "Was he injured?"

"Besides the injuries he sustained on our previous adventure," Iko huffed, both his arms shaking. "He was unharmed. But--"

He wrapped his long leg around one of Bora's and tripped him, flipping the sturdier officer- and making it look easy.

"He did have an encounter with Vera 'Eetumee," said Iko, as he crouched and thrust his blade towards his friend's throat a second time. Bora's eyes took on a rage that was defied by his position. Iko offered a hand to help him up and he took it.

"He is onboard this vessel?" Bora growled. "You should not have told me for I may murder him in his sleep." Bora stopped and suddenly looked down. With a puzzled expression he inspected Iko's leg. "Say Iko â€|aren't you missing something?"

Iko returned Bora's confused look and stuck out his leg to examine it.

"Damn." He had forgotten one of his shin guards.

Bora rolled with laughter.

"Were you in a bit of a hurry getting dressed?" he asked between bouts of laughter. "Were you trying to get out before he woke up? Or just didn't want him to get a good view of your bony ass!"

"My bony ass?" Iko repeated indignantly. "And I suppose you think yours is tremendously shapely."

"Of course," Bora said simply. "Don't pretend you haven't noticed." He paused a moment before he resumed laughing.

"Whatever," Iko said, deactivating his weapon. He strode towards the exit. "Why don't you go brag to 'Rozokumee? I'm sure he'd be more than willing to appreciate your _fat ass_." He chuckled as he turned

the corner and disappeared from sight. In the empty training room, Bora was left alone to hear the echo of his laughter long after it had come to an abrupt stop.

-

Eekyip dozed, now hopelessly entangled in the sheet 'Ebamee had draped over him. He was soothed by the rhythm of his own breathing. He was so relaxed that when he heard the soft hum of the mechanical door sliding open, he absently assumed it was 'Ebamee coming back to his room. He almost fell into a deep sleep before he heard the amused sounds of an Elite; a voice that was not the Squad-leader's.

Eekyip tried to sit upright, but the blanket which had eased his anxiety now served as a trap, hindering his movement. The Elite came towards him and leaned over the cot so he could look Eekyip over.

'Rozokumee had come in under the excuse that he was looking forâ€|well he forgot what he was pretending to be looking for exactly. The truth was: he had overheard the twins telling Bora 'Mozomee that Iko had a new roommate. Intrigued, he decided toâ€|snoop shamelessly.

"Hello," the Elite hummed.

Eekyip froze. He had a feeling that the Elites over Officer 'Ebamee wouldn't be too happy about his stay. As if reading his mind, the shifty Elite spoke again.

"Don't worry, little Unggoy." His voice was smooth and lyrical. "I won't tell anyone Iko is hiding you in here."

Eekyip tried to speak, but his mind suddenly went blank. So he simply babbled something along the lines of "Hazafum buhhâ€|" The Elite shushed him and rested a graceful hand on his knee. It was then that Iko 'Ebamee walked in, the door sliding shut behind him with a quiet whir.

He eyed the shorter Sangheili warily. Ellia 'Rozokumee turned, sensing his leader's unease.

"Relax boss," he said with a grin. "I'm not going to tell on you. 'Fesamee would absolutely flip out." His grin became devilish. Iko sighed.

"What do you want, Ellia?" he asked reluctantly.

"I'll think of something," said Ellia, his smooth tone defied by his mischievous expression. He turned to Eekyip. "You behave now, little one," he said, in a voice that sounded to Eekyip like poetry.

Iko stood rigid as Ellia strode toward him. Ellia playfully flicked the warrior's mandibles as he exited the room. Iko sighed again and his posture relaxed.

Iko paced around the room a bit. He regarded his forgotten shin guard, and stretched his sore limbs languidly.

"You look tired, Officer 'Ebamee," he said, attempting to move at

all. The Elite smiled.

"Iko," he corrected the Grunt gently. Eekyip looked puzzled.

"Ex- â€|mmm- Master Iko, Excellence-"

"Just Iko," he said.

"Ma- â€|Iko, sir."

Iko laughed out loud.

"In a few hours, I will take you to the Unggoy barracks. I will pass you off as my new assistant, and you won't draw much attention from the upper ranks."

Eekyip was relieved. Iko diligently removed his armor piece by piece. He didn't bother to discard the under-suit. His head hanging low he trudged across his small room. He crawled in to bed with the sweetly smiling Unggoy. His long fingers tickled as he uncurled Eekyip from the soft blanket and the Grunt giggled. Iko draped half of the blanket over his lower body, his hooved feet sticking out at the bottom, and propped his head up with his arm. His eyes lingered on the Unggoy a moment before closing. Eekyip stared at him, head tilted in wonder.

"Why did you bring me back here, and not to the Grunt barracks?" he asked innocently. An undignified snore rumbled out of Iko's throat and Eekyip frowned. "Officer 'Ebamee-"

"Iko," the Elite corrected him. Eekyip grinned at him.

"I knew you were awake," he said, laughing. Iko opened one eye to look at him, and smirked. He took hold of the blanket with his free hand.

"Go to sleep, my Unggoy." He pulled the blanket over Eekyip's head, breaking eye contact with him. He rested his arm flat across the cot, and his head on the arm. Eekyip wiggled and kicked his exposed feet until Iko wrapped his other arm around the Grunt's waist. The Elite pulled him close, properly under the covers once again, and Eekyip's head resting on his savior's collar bone. Panic would normally have overcome him in this situation, but the steady rise and fall of Iko's chest, and his persistent fatigue, soon lulled Eekyip back to sleep.

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The experienced Spec Ops trooper that he was, Rigreek knew his way around a carrier fairly well. But when trying to avoid certain weirdo Brute Honor Guard, he found himself arriving late for the last meal of the day.

"I mean what the hell is wrong with that guy anyway?" he said to no one in particular. "He must not have anything better toâ€|doâ€|" Rigreek briefly contemplated the very obvious better things an Honor Guard could be doing. "Hm. Not one of the brightest things I've ever said, good thing it's just me-" Rigreek glanced over his shoulder to see Papat staring back at him like a mirror imageâ€|only grinning like a jackass.

"Explain to me Rig," Papat said while wiping the remnants of dinner from his mouth. "

>I wanna laugh." The former medic grinned. Rigreek stepped before the doorway to the eating area, ignoring him. The clamor contained within exploded into the corridor as he slipped through. Papat didn't follow him, but turned to go in the other direction. "Laugh myself to death, knowing your dumbass." The door slid shut between them before Rigreek could turn to glare at his friend. Shrugging the incident off, he strolled about the room a moment and found Mitmeer. Rigreek stood over him, watching him eat with mild disdain. Mitmeer slurped his spoonful of nutrient paste, staring back up at Rigreek like a dog with a bone.<p>

"Where is he?" asked Rigreek. He was careful to keep his tone free of ill intent. His efforts were wasted on Mitmeer.

"Don't know," he said nonchalantly, and scooped up another bite.

"Bullshit," Rigreek replied promptly. Mitmeer stared at him as he sloshed the food around in his mouth, Rigreek grimacing.

"You either know where he does, or you don't â€"

"Clearly," interjected Mitmeer, his mouth full. Rigreek resumed his statement.

"â€ Or you DON'T, and you're worried sick," he finished. Mitmeer swallowed.

"Do I look worried?"

"So where is he?" Rigreek said, sensing that he was getting to Mitmeer. The larger trooper placed his hands palms down on the table and rose to tower over his guest.

"WHADDAYA WANT, Rigreek?" he snapped, suddenly wound up.

"I just wanna talk to him," Rigreek said defensively.

"BULLSHIT."

"Wh-?" Rigreek started to protest.

"You got that _look_, Rigreek. You got that damn look!"

"What look?" Rigreek asked, genuinely confused.

"That LOOK! That _look _you get when you're about to do somethingâ€| " Mitmeer paused and took another bite. "Inadvisable." He took a seat and resumed his meal. Rigreek wasn't sure how to react.

"What are you goin on about, Mit?" he asked.

"You're eyes get all crazy wide, like that." He pointed at his companion's face. "And that smile starts to tug at the corners of your mouth, and you just stare and nod like a fuckin psychopath." Mitmeer continued to point at him as he chewed. Rigreek nodded.

"So, where is he?" he asked again. Mitmeer slammed his fist on the table and stood up again. Rigreek held up his hands, palms out. "Okay, okay. Enjoy your meal," he said, pointing to the overturned bowl next to Mitmeer's fist. The larger Grunt looked down, missing Rigreek as he scurried out of the dining area.

"GOD. DAMN it." Mitmeer caught the last of Rigreek's escape from the corner of his eye and the look remained on his face for several moments. Slowly it began to melt back into his usual indifferent expression. "Scheme all you want, Rig. Let your imagination run wild," he said, though Rigreek was well out of earshot. "Even you couldn't guess where Eekyip is now," he muttered, and licked his spoon.

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* * *

><p>Chapter 6 in progress. Hope you liked.<p>

End
file.